



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



TUESDAY — 8 MAR 2022

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HEADLINE	03/08 WHO reverses call: Covid boosters needed
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/who-says-covid-boosters-needed-reversing-previous-call/
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) —An expert group convened by the World Health Organization said Tuesday it “strongly supports urgent and broad access” to booster doses, in a reversal of the U.N. agency’s previous insistence that boosters weren’t necessary and contributed to vaccine inequity.</p> <p>In a statement, WHO said its expert group concluded that immunization with authorized COVID-19 vaccines provide high levels of protection against severe disease and death amid the global circulation of the hugely contagious omicron variant.</p> <p>It said vaccination, including the use of boosters, was especially important for people at risk of severe disease.</p> <p>Last year, WHO’s director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called for a moratorium on booster doses while dozens of countries embarked on administering the doses, saying rich countries should immediately donate those vaccines to poor countries instead. WHO scientists said at the time they would continue to evaluate incoming data.</p> <p>Numerous scientific studies have since proven that booster doses of authorized vaccines help restore waning immunity and protect against serious COVID-19. Booster programs in rich countries including Britain, Canada and the U.S. have been credited with preventing the surge in omicron infections from spilling over into hospitals and cemeteries.</p> <p>WHO said it is continuing to monitor the global spread of omicron, including a “stealth” version known as BA.2, which has been documented to have re-infected some people after an initial case of omicron. There’s mixed research on whether it causes more severe disease, but vaccines appear just as effective against it.</p> <p>WHO noted that the current authorized COVID-19 vaccines are all based on the strain that was first detected in Wuhan, China more than three years ago.</p> <p>“Since then, there has been continuous and substantial virus evolution and it is likely that this evolution will continue, resulting in the emergence of new variants,” the agency said. It added that coronavirus vaccines would likely need to be updated.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 Covid found in 29 kinds of animals
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/covid-19-has-now-been-found-in-29-kinds-of-animals-which-has-scientists-concerned/
GIST	<p>PHILADELPHIA — The 11-year-old cat had been vomiting and lethargic for several days, and showed little interest in food.</p> <p>When the pet was examined at the University of Pennsylvania’s Ryan Veterinary Hospital in September, her owner mentioned a possible clue to the symptoms: Someone in the household had COVID-19.</p> <p>The animal’s nasal swab turned up negative. A fecal sample, on the other hand, told the tale. The shorthair feline was infected with the delta variant.</p> <p>Scientists have now found the coronavirus in 29 kinds of animals, a list that has been steadily growing almost since the start of the pandemic and includes cats, dogs, ferrets, hamsters, tigers, mice, otters, and hippos. In most cases, the animals have not been shown to transmit the virus back to humans.</p>

But in at least two cases, it looks as if they can. Minks have spread the virus to people, and in a new Canadian study, scientists identified one person who tested positive after unspecified “close contact” with infected white-tailed deer.

The good news is that with all known variants that have circulated in humans, the vaccines remain very good at preventing severe disease. The concern is that as the virus continues to circulate in other animals, it could accumulate mutations that render the vaccines less effective. Increased surveillance is key.

We spoke to three scientists about what the latest animal findings mean: Eman Anis, assistant professor of microbiology at Penn’s School of Veterinary Medicine; Suresh V. Kuchipudi, a professor of veterinary and biomedical sciences at Pennsylvania State University; and Frederic Bushman, professor of microbiology at Penn’s Perelman School of Medicine.

Q. How do they find COVID in animals?

A. In the case of deer, scientists typically test animals that have been hunted or killed in car accidents. With domestic and zoo animals, testing can be done much as it is in people. A sample taken with a nasal swab can be tested just like a human swab — using the laboratory method called polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

The exact procedure might vary from animal to animal. When vets tested a tiger at the Bronx Zoo in April 2020, for example, they wisely sedated her in advance.

For now, the American Veterinary Medical Association recommends against routine testing of pets, as they do not often get sick with COVID, and they are not thought to play a big role in spreading the disease to humans. But testing may be warranted if the animal shows symptoms consistent with COVID, or has come in close contact with an infected human, the association says.

Both things were true for the cat at Penn. In a case study, vets wrote that the animal’s symptoms might be partly explained by another condition, a gastrointestinal disorder called chronic enteropathy. But the cat’s owners had kept that condition under control by managing her diet. The cat began vomiting only after the household member came down with COVID, suggesting the virus was indeed to blame.

Once the cat tested positive, her sample was sent to Bushman’s lab, which used a sequencer to read the entire genome of the virus. It was clearly the delta variant and was a close match to versions of delta also found circulating in people in the Philadelphia area.

Q. Why worry about COVID in animals?

A. Every time a virus makes copies of itself inside a new host, it makes a few random “spelling” mistakes in its genetic code — mutations. Most mutations either have no impact on the fitness of the virus, or they may cause it to become less viable.

But every so often, a set of mutations will improve the microbe’s ability to spread to other cells, and ultimately its ability to infect other hosts.

With the right combination of attributes, a virus can even jump from one host species to another. That’s how the COVID pandemic got started in late 2019, with horseshoe bats — though a debate is ongoing as to whether bats spread the virus to humans in a live-animal market, through a laboratory accident, or some other means.

Public health agencies have done a fairly good job of tracking viral mutations in infected people, sounding the alarm when a set of worrisome mutations warrants the label “variant of concern.” But there is far less surveillance of the virus in animal populations, especially in the wild, said Anis, the microbiologist at Penn’s vet school.

“It could be evolving in hosts we are not aware of,” she said.

In the infected deer in the new Canadian study, the coronavirus had evolved dozens of mutations not found in other strains, leading scientists to proclaim it as “highly divergent.” Translation: on the family tree of the virus, this lineage was off on its own branch — suggesting it had been circulating in deer and racking up new mutations for a while, unbeknown to science.

This lineage does not appear to be different enough that it would evade protection from the vaccines. That’s because the vaccines teach the human immune system to recognize the “spike” protein on the exterior of each virus, whereas many of the mutations in this deer version occurred elsewhere in the virus.

Still, we need to keep an eye on it, said Penn State’s Kuchipudi, who was not involved in the Canadian study but has done his own studies in deer. As the virus continues to circulate in deer, more mutations will arise, and we need to be ready in case.

“There is no need to panic,” he said, “but this is not something we can ignore.”

Q. How many more tricks does this virus have in store?

A. Early in the pandemic, scientists determined that the coronavirus spike was a very close fit with “receptors” found on cells in human airways, almost like a match between a key and a lock. That’s what made it so adept at penetrating cells.

That finding was essential in developing the vaccines. They teach the immune system to make antibodies that bind to the spike, interfering with its ability to get inside a cell.

But the threat of any particular virus is about much more than penetrating cells, said Bushman, the Penn microbiologist. Other segments of the genetic code are involved in making copies of the virus inside the host cells, exiting the cell, and traveling from host to host, among other steps in its virulent journey.

Along came delta, followed by omicron, both of which had acquired new mutations that made them more transmissible. The vaccines still offered good protection against severe disease from both strains, yet they managed to cause plenty of havoc.

One theory is that omicron developed in an immunocompromised person, evolving more mutations as the person was unable to fully clear it. Another theory is that the strain evolved somewhere in the developing world, where there is less surveillance, or that it evolved in a wild animal, such as a mouse.

Q. Are more worrisome combinations in store?

A. “It’s hard to predict what evolution’s going to come up with,” Bushman said. “The virus will probably change different ways in different animals. Some of them probably won’t infect humans as well. But the fear is that maybe some new one will come along that does infect humans well.”

The only answer, he said, is to keep looking.

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HEADLINE	03/07 ‘Stuck’ Russia convoy hides mysteries
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/07/russian-convoy-ukraine/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Makeshift roadblocks have been installed throughout this capital to impede the movements of Russian troops snaking toward the city in a convoy about 15 miles away.</p> <p>On some strategic thruways, Ukrainians have parked trams and buses to restrict driving access. Checkpoints to inspect IDs have also been established to root out would-be saboteurs. “We have a lot of presents” for the Russians, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said in an interview. “It’s not sweet. It’s very painful.”</p> <p>The extended 40-mile parade of Russian armored vehicles, tanks and towed artillery headed from the north on a path toward Kyiv has both alarmed and befuddled watchers of this expanding war. It’s not just its sheer size. It’s also because that for days, it has not appreciably been moving.</p>

U.S. officials attribute the apparent stall in part to logistical failures on the Russian side, including as a result of food and fuel shortages, that have slowed Moscow's advance through various parts of the country. They have also credited Ukrainian efforts to attack selected parts of the convoy with contributing to its slowdown. Still, officials warn that the Russians could regroup at any moment and continue to press forward.

In Kyiv, the approaching convoy has mustered much more inspiration than fear, motivating residents to exact revenge on the Russian invasion [in any way they can](#).

"The target in Ukraine is not secret. The target is capital of Ukraine," Klitschko said.

Russian troop movements from the north pose a risk, he acknowledged. "And we prepare to give the answer," he said.

In northern Kyiv, soldiers and volunteers [have dug trenches and set up positions](#) and equipment — including an anti-aircraft gun — to prepare for the potential arrival of Russian troops in the capital. Nearly every business in the city, except for certain grocery stores, gas stations and pharmacies, have closed. With schools and offices shuttered, residents have largely either fled or joined the resistance.

While U.S. officials say the convoy is designed to replenish and re-equip Russian forces, they acknowledge it is still possible that certain elements could be intended to help the attack.

"Our assessment is that it's largely meant for resupply — but I can't rule out that there aren't combat vehicles," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Monday. "We can't even say that it's all one convoy and not several."

Still, the convoy's progress — or lack thereof — continues to capture popular fascination, thanks to a steady stream of satellite images and [video recorded](#) and disseminated by Maxar Technologies, a space technology and intelligence company.

The images have put the business of tracking Russian supply lines, normally the occupation of secretive government agencies, into the public sphere, making them staples of TV news broadcasts and inspiring armchair generals around the world to offer their advice on how to attack the column. The massive lineup of military vehicles — sometimes positioned two or three side-by-side on the road, sometimes spaced by several yards — appears both formidable and foreboding.

While fuel and ammunition transport vehicles tend to stick out, they can be camouflaged, said Michael Kofman, director of Russian studies at CNA and an expert on the Russian military.

The British defense ministry supports U.S. officials' assessment that Russia is trying to correct course to overcome logistical challenges, but it also provides more potential targets for Ukrainians trying to handicap the Russian war effort.

Fuel trucks are exactly the sort of "soft targets" that the Ukrainians should be aiming to attack as they attempt to undermine the more sizable and powerful Russian army's ability to fight, according to Rep. Jason Crow (D-Colo.), an Army veteran who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq and visited Ukraine in recent weeks.

"You don't hit the combat units. You don't hit the tanks. You hit the fuel trucks, the ammunition trucks," Crow said. "You cut off their supplies, and you also try to strike terror into the minds of the enemy."

The sight of the stretch of Russian vehicles appears to be helping bolster public opinion toward providing more military aid. Government officials, once reluctant to escalate involvement in the conflict, are now talking about providing aircraft and additional munitions to help Ukraine resist the ongoing invasion.

“I call that 40-mile convoy, by the way, the biggest, fattest target in Ukraine,” retired Navy admiral James Stavridis, who previously led NATO forces as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, said on MSNBC. Put certain fighter jets “in the hands of the Ukrainians,” he added, “and watch that thing blow up.”

The question of whether to equip Ukraine with enhanced air power has gripped NATO allies over the last week, after an initial plan for European nations to send fighter jets to Ukraine formed but then appeared to fall apart, under Russian threats to mete out “consequences” for countries materially assisting the Ukrainian resistance.

Over the weekend, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made impassioned appeals to world leaders and [directly to members of Congress](#) for planes and drones to hold off the Russian advance. Now, there are potential plans under discussion in which the United States could help facilitate Poland sending MiG-29 planes to Ukraine by backfilling the Polish fleet.

On Sunday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was “[very, very actively](#)” working toward such a plan.

That stands in contrast to the administration’s demonstrated resistance to calls for establishing a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which would almost certainly require direct engagement with Russian air forces. President Biden has repeatedly stated that no U.S. troops would be deployed to Ukraine.

U.S. officials have similarly ignored calls from lawmakers to supply attack aircraft to Ukraine directly. A push to send Ukraine, A-10 Warthogs, for example, has gone nowhere, in part because most Ukrainian military pilots are not trained on them.

The country’s forces are more familiar with how to operate, maintain and repair the Soviet-era MiG fighters potentially on offer from Poland, to give them more muscle as they battle the Russians for control of the airspace over key spots, like the convoy.

“More than likely, Russian forces have local air superiority, so it’s doubtful Ukrainian forces have good opportunity to strike,” Kofman said of Kyiv’s current posture. Given that imbalance, he added, “the Ukrainians’ best chance” of damaging the convoy at this point “is with drones.”

Ukraine has had some success striking Russia targets with Bayraktar TB2 drones, which were purchased from Turkey. Last week, Ukraine’s defense minister said [in a Facebook post](#) that additional Bayraktar drones had just arrived in the country, but it is unclear how many more drones Kyiv had bought.

Tony Radakin, the head of the United Kingdom’s armed forces, said during an interview with the BBC on Sunday that the Ukrainian attacks on the convoy are “impacting on morale” among Russian troops. Some of those troops are camping out in the nearby forest, Radakin added, for fear of staying in convoy vehicles that might be struck.

It remains to be seen if Ukraine will be able to cause enough damage to the convoy and other Russian supply lines to hold back the Russian advance — and whether their efforts will be fast enough to change the course of the fight.

As the Russian ground advance hit snags, its efforts to bombard Ukrainian cities appear to be intensifying. In recent days, Russia has been “increasing its use of long-range firepower to supplement or to make up for the lack of ground movement,” a senior defense official said Monday, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under terms established by the Pentagon. Civilians are also being hit as they attempt to flee, the official added.

The U.N. high commissioner for refugees [estimated Sunday](#) that more than 1.5 million people living in Ukraine have fled since the Russian invasion began, making it “the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II.”

	<p>Despite the courage and motivation to fight the incoming convoy, Kyiv residents have also watched in desperation the shelling and cutoff escape routes in cities elsewhere.</p> <p>Although residents are gearing up for the approaching convoy, they know they soon might not have the chance to get out as more roads are overtaken by the Russians. On Monday evening, the central train station in Kyiv was packed with families escaping the capital, many carrying their dogs and cats as they crammed into crowded trains headed west.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 Japan, Australia impose more sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/03/08/Ukraine-Japan-Australia-sanctions-Russia/4601646725144/
GIST	<p>March 8 (UPI) -- Japan and Australia on Tuesday imposed a new round of sanctions against Russian and Belarusian officials and oligarchs as the Kremlin's war with Ukraine nears two weeks.</p> <p>Tokyo's Ministry of Finance announced it was freezing the assets of 20 Russians and 12 Belarusians as well as a dozen companies and organizations.</p> <p>Among those named were high-ranking members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's administration as well as those in his inner circle, such as Gennady Timchenko, the founder of Volga Group. Dmitry Peskov, Putin's press secretary, was also hit.</p> <p>Belarusians named included President Alexander Lukashenko's two sons, Viktor and Dmitry.</p> <p>The sanctions also bar the export of oil refining equipment to Russia and the export of general-purpose goods that could contribute to strengthening the military capabilities of Belarus.</p> <p>In a statement, Japan said it imposed the sanctions due to the "current international situation surrounding Ukraine" and following other countries in listing these individuals in order to "to maintain international peace and safety and contribute to international efforts for international peace."</p> <p>Tokyo is one of the few countries in Asia to take a hard stance against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, imposing several rounds of sanctions against Russian officials and oligarchs as well as excluding seven Russian banks from the SWIFT payments network.</p> <p>"Our nation will continue to collaborate with the Group of Seven [nations] and the international community toward an improvement in the situation," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said during a press conference, according to Kyodo news agency.</p> <p>The sanctions came as Australia imposed another round of its own targeting those involved in Russia's attack on Ukraine and spreading Kremlin propaganda and disinformation.</p> <p>Canberra listed six unnamed senior Russian military commanders for asset freezes and travel bans on accusations of "implementing naval, ground and air attacks" on their neighboring country, Minister of foreign Affairs Marise Payne said Tuesday in a statement.</p> <p>Ten unnamed individuals were also hit with sanctions "for their role in encouraging hostility towards Ukraine and promoting pro-Kremlin propaganda to legitimize Russia's invasion," she said.</p> <p>Payne accused the individuals of spreading Putin's "false narratives" about the objective of the invasion being the denazification of Ukraine as well as making "erroneous allegations" of Kyiv committing genocide against ethnic Russian and promoting the recognition of the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics.</p>

	<p>With the start of Moscow's anticipated invasion of Ukraine, Putin announced the independence of the two Russian separatist-controlled regions and said they would begin a "special military operation" in Ukraine to demilitarize and denazify it as Putin has claimed the country to be controlled by Nazis.</p> <p>"Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by a widespread disinformation campaign, both within Russia and internationally," she said. "Tragically for Russia, President Putin has shut down independent voices and locked everyday Russians into a world characterized by lies and disinformation."</p> <p>Like Japan, Australia has already imposed a slew of sanctions against Russia along with allies the United States, Canada, Britain and the European Union as part of their effort to isolate Moscow and cripple its economy.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Pentagon deploys more troops to Europe
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2022-03-07/u-s-officials-deploy-more-troops-to-europe-as-russian-advance-stalls
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The U.S. military ordered the deployment of 500 additional troops to Europe, pushing the total number of American forces on the continent to about 100,000 as it seeks to deter Russia from broadening its unprovoked war in Ukraine, Pentagon officials said Monday.</p> <p>The officials said the personnel moves come as Russia has committed nearly all of its pre-assembled combat forces into the battle over the former Soviet republic, an onslaught that has resulted in an increasing number of civilian fatalities. In a sign that Russian forces may need additional help in overcoming stiff Ukrainian resistance, U.S. officials said it appears the Kremlin is seeking to recruit foreign fighters from Syria to help in Ukraine.</p> <p>“We do believe that the accounts of the Russians seeking Syrian fighters to augment their forces in Ukraine, we believe there’s truth to that,” said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, adding that the Pentagon does not have any assessments on who these fighters would be, how many there would be, if there are any inside Ukraine now, what they are getting paid or any other details.</p> <p>The Wall Street Journal first reported Sunday that Russia is recruiting fighters from Syria to aid in its invasion of Ukraine. A news outlet in Syria, Deir Ezzor 24, reported last week that Russia was offering \$200 to \$300 for Syrian fighters willing to go to Ukraine for six months to “operate as guards.”</p> <p>Russia may be seeking to bolster its forces in Ukraine because its advance has stalled, said a Pentagon official, speaking on condition of anonymity. “They just have not made any significant progress on the ground” toward major cities that Russian forces have been seeking to capture, the official said.</p> <p>“The Ukrainians are putting up a very stiff resistance,” the official added, “and [the Russian troops] just have not made much progress” in recent days. Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion on Feb. 24 after Ukraine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries rebuffed his demands to block Ukraine from ever entering NATO.</p> <p>Defense Department officials said the troop deployments on Monday and others in recent weeks were temporary measures designed to shore up the defenses of NATO countries and deter potential Russian aggression.</p> <p>President Biden and other top U.S. officials have stressed the country’s commitment to NATO’s Article 5, which stipulates an attack on one of the alliance’s 30 members is an attack on all. That would mean committing troops to combat to help another NATO member. It has been invoked just one time — after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.</p> <p>“These are not permanent moves. We’re going to adjust the posture as conditions evolve,” the official said.</p>

	<p>While the world has rallied around Ukraine and cheered on its defiance, Russia's lack of progress has led its military to change its tactics in more brutal ways. It is now relying on more long-range missile and artillery bombardments to subdue Ukrainian resistance, leading to a spike in civilian casualties and far more damage to apartment buildings, schools and hospitals, according to U.S. officials.</p> <p>"The bottom line is, more civilians are being killed and wounded, more civilian infrastructure's being damaged or destroyed," Kirby said.</p> <p>While Kherson, a city in the country's south, fell to Russian forces, Ukraine maintains control over Kyiv, the capital, as well as Kharkiv and Chernihiv, two other major cities, U.S. officials said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 Iran: won't back down on 'red lines' in talks
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-will-not-back-down-its-red-lines-fars-news-agency-citing-president-2022-03-08/
GIST	<p>DUBAI, March 8 (Reuters) - Iran will not back down on its red lines in nuclear talks with major powers, President Ebrahim Raisi said on Tuesday, after the European Union said the time had come for Washington and Tehran to take political decisions needed to reach an accord.</p> <p>Eleven months of negotiations to revive the 2015 nuclear deal which lifted sanctions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear programme have reached their final stages.</p> <p>Iran has sought to remove all sanctions and it wants guarantees from the United States that it will not abandon the deal once more, after then-U.S. President Donald Trump walked out of the deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions.</p> <p>Iran's top negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, returned to Tehran on Monday for consultations.</p> <p>"The government pursues nuclear negotiations in full accordance with the principles and framework set by the Supreme Leader," Raisi said, referring to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in Tehran's decision.</p> <p>"It has not and will not back down on any of these red lines," the semi-official Fars news agency quoted Raisi as saying.</p> <p>Talks coordinator Enrique Mora of the European Union said on Monday that the political decisions needed to conclude the negotiations successfully must be taken in the next few days.</p> <p>Diplomats say several differences still need to be overcome in the talks, which were also hit by a last-minute demand from Russia for a guarantee from the United States that Russian trade, investment and military-technical cooperation with Iran would not be hindered by sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken played down the issue during a visit to Estonia, saying Russia has a self-interest in preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear arms.</p> <p>"We continue to work to see if we can come back to mutual compliance with Iran on the deal. Russia continues to be engaged in those efforts and it has its own interest in ensuring that Iran is not able to acquire a nuclear weapon," Blinken said.</p> <p>Should the talks collapse, it could carry the risk of Tehran getting to within a short sprint of nuclear weapons and igniting a fresh war in the Middle East. It could also prompt the West to impose more harsh sanctions on Iran and further escalate world oil prices already strained by the Ukraine conflict.</p> <p>Parties involved in the talks said last week that a deal was expected to be reached within days.</p>

	<p>European negotiators from France, Britain, and Germany had already temporarily left the talks as they believed they had gone as far as they could go and it was now up to the two main protagonists to agree on outstanding issues, including the extent to which sanctions on Iran would be rolled back.</p> <p>Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is under U.S. sanctions, successfully put a second military satellite into orbit, state media said on Tuesday, in what would be another advance for Iran's military.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 WHO: attacks on Ukraine hospitals increase
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/attacks-ukrainian-hospitals-ambulances-increasing-rapidly-who-warns-2022-03-08/
GIST	<p>March 8 (Reuters) - Attacks on hospitals, ambulances and other health care facilities in Ukraine have increased rapidly in recent days and the country is running short of vital medical supplies, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The U.N. agency confirmed on Monday that at least nine people had died in 16 attacks on health care facilities since the start of a Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. It did not say who was responsible.</p> <p>The WHO's senior emergency officer for Europe, Catherine Smallwood, told a news briefing that the tally included incidents where ambulances had been commandeered for purposes other than emergency healthcare.</p> <p>"We will continue to update those numbers. They've been increasing quite rapidly over the past few days," Smallwood said.</p> <p>The agency is working to rapidly provide medical supplies to Ukraine, where oxygen, insulin, personal protective equipment, surgical items and blood products are running low, Europe regional director Hans Kluge told the briefing.</p> <p>The supply of oxygen, children's vaccines, especially against polio amid an outbreak, and mental health expertise are among the WHO's top priorities for the region, he said.</p> <p>In a separate statement, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said countries neighbouring Ukraine which are hosting Ukrainian refugees should include them in their vaccine programmes against a range of diseases,</p> <p>They should prioritise vaccinating against COVID-19 and polio and also against measles, as the current inoculation coverage is insufficient to prevent measles outbreaks, the ECDC said in a statement.</p> <p>"Crowding in bomb shelters and reception centres could facilitate the start of a measles outbreak, particularly as spring coincides with the natural seasonality of the disease," the agency added.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Iran Revolutionary Guards launch satellite
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/iran-nuclear/2022/03/08/id/1060124/
GIST	<p>Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard launched a second satellite into space, state media reported Monday, just as world powers awaited Tehran's decision in negotiations over the country's tattered nuclear deal.</p> <p>State television identified the launch as coming in Shahroud Desert, without specifying when the launch took place. However, it came as Iran's top diplomat at the monthslong talks suddenly flew home late Monday for consultations, a sign of the growing pressure on Tehran as the negotiations appear to be nearing their end.</p>

The Guard said the Noor-2 satellite reached a low orbit on the Ghased satellite carrier, IRNA reported. It described the Ghased as a three-phase, mixed fuel satellite carrier.

U.S. officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The launch comes days after satellite pictures suggested Iran's civilian program suffered another failed launch.

Noor means “light” in Farsi. The Guard launched its first Noor satellite in 2020, revealing to the world it ran its own space program.

The head of the U.S. Space Command later dismissed the satellite as “a tumbling webcam in space” that wouldn’t provide Iran vital intelligence — though it showed Tehran’s ability to successfully get into orbit after a series of setbacks.

The U.S. has alleged Iran’s satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution and has called on Tehran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, previously maintained that its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. U.S. intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran abandoned an organized military nuclear program in 2003.

Meanwhile, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency described negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani's trip home as being “within the framework of the usual consultations during the talks.” However, the top negotiator for the European Union seemed to suggest whether the talks succeeded or failed now rested with the Islamic Republic.

“There are no longer ‘expert level talks.’ Nor ‘formal meetings,’” Enrique Mora wrote on Twitter, responding to comments by an Iranian analyst. “It is time, in the next few days, for political decisions to end the (hashtag)ViennaTalks. The rest is noise.”

Mora's comments mirror those of British and French negotiators at the Vienna talks, which has been working to find a way to get America back into the accord it unilaterally abandoned in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump. It also hopes to get Iran to again agree to measures that drastically scaled back its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

They also appear to push back against a constant Iranian refrain in the last weeks of talks that tried to blame any delay on America, which hasn't been in the room for talks since Trump's withdrawal. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday said he believed “we're close” on reaching a deal, though there were “a couple of very challenging remaining issues.”

The latest wrinkle, however, is a demand Saturday from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that Blinken offer written guarantees over Moscow's ability to continue trade with Iran as it faces sanctions over its war on Ukraine.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian spoke Monday by phone with Lavrov, with the sanctions threat apparently discussed, according to a statement from his office.

“We are against war and imposition of sanctions, and it is clear that cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and any country, including Russia, should not be affected by the atmosphere of sanctions,” Amirabdollahian said in the statement.

The 2015 nuclear deal saw Iran put advanced centrifuges into storage under the watch of the International Atomic Energy Agency, while keeping its enrichment at 3.67% purity and its stockpile at only 300 kilograms (661 pounds) of uranium.

	As of Feb. 19, the IAEA says Iran's stockpile of all enriched uranium was nearly 3200 kilograms (7,055 pounds). Some has been enriched up to 60% purity — a short technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90%.
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HEADLINE	03/08 Health crisis spills out of Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/health-crisis-ukraine-war/2022/03/08/id/1060116/
GIST	<p>Katya was on the way to hospital for an urgent operation for her 17-year-old daughter Alinka, who has bone cancer, when Russia invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>Their doctor at Kyiv's National Cancer Institute called them and advised them to turn around and go home for their own safety. It soon dawned on the family that the only option was to continue Alinka's treatment abroad.</p> <p>"We decided (this) without hesitation, because this is not only a war with our occupiers, but also a war for the life of our child," said Katya, who did not give her surname.</p> <p>She and her daughter are now in Warsaw, Poland, awaiting more treatment for Alinka, whose condition is stable.</p> <p>They are among more than one million people who have fled to Poland from Ukraine to escape the escalating war. Another 700,000 have gone to neighboring countries like Romania and Moldova. Four million people may ultimately flee, the United Nations has estimated.</p> <p>The World Health Organization (WHO) is warning that the exodus raises the specter of a regional health catastrophe on top of the huge toll in death and destruction from the fighting in Ukraine.</p> <p>"(It's) not confined to one or two countries, but really regionally, and globally," WHO Europe director Hans Kluge told Reuters in an interview late last week.</p> <p>BREAKING POINT</p> <p>In wartime, healthcare crises - a lack of access to hospitals and treatment, outbreaks of disease, malnutrition and the like - often kill far more people than bombs and bullets.</p> <p>In Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last week, there have been Russian strikes on hospitals, schools and homes. Critical drug shortages have arisen and neonatal wards have been moved underground to shelter from bombing. Russia denies targeting civilian infrastructure.</p> <p>The fear now is that the refugee influx into neighboring countries will push their health systems over the edge too.</p> <p>The WHO's Kluge said health services in Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Moldova were coping so far. "But this is as of today. We have seen in the past that health systems have a breaking point, and the situation is very unpredictable."</p> <p>Those bearing the brunt of refugee arrivals fear that the breaking point is close, pointing out that the numbers of beds and doctors cannot double overnight, particularly in healthcare systems already exhausted by two years of COVID-19.</p> <p>"We can announce that we will treat all Ukrainian children, but I am afraid it is simply unrealistic. We will provide the best possible help, but we cannot work miracles," said Ernest Kuchar, head of pediatrics at the Medical University of Warsaw hospital.</p> <p>The Polish Health Ministry said its hospitals have the capacity to treat around 7,000 patients from Ukraine.</p>

LONGER-TERM CHALLENGE

Up to one million new potential patients would overwhelm any country's health system, according to Kate White, emergency program manager for the aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders).

For the short term, international humanitarian agencies, national governments and volunteers are scrambling to send trauma kits, emergency medications and ambulances to border crossing points with Ukraine.

As yet there are no field hospitals on the Hungarian, Polish Slovak or Moldovan borders, the U.N. refugee agency confirmed.

The European Union, which has granted Ukrainian refugees temporary residence rights - which includes access to medical care, is also working to help member state Poland, and White said the EU's standardized regulatory environment could make shipping emergency supplies to the country quicker.

Some refugees are also reaching EU member states further west: for example, Germany has registered 50,000.

But all partners involved in the relief efforts said it was longer-term or chronic needs, often among patients arriving without documentation, medication or the ability to speak the local language, that could prove the biggest challenge.

These include treating people like Alinka, as well as those with other diseases including diabetes, HIV and tuberculosis. Ukraine, a country of 44 million, has 2.3 million people with diabetes, 250,000 people living with HIV and around 160,000 cancer patients, according to the latest WHO estimates.

Alongside trauma injuries, the WHO has classed dealing with some of these conditions as its highest priority in its most recent report on the health impact of the Russian invasion.

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ukraine-phsa-shortform-030322.pdf>

Diabetes, COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, and cardiovascular and respiratory conditions are all marked "red," meaning that without attention there is a real risk of "high levels of morbidity or mortality" from the impact of the war on healthcare, the assessment reads.

In Warsaw, Kuchar said, almost every refugee child arriving at his hospital has tested positive for COVID-19, probably due to the cramped conditions in which they fled Ukraine, where new coronavirus cases were averaging around 27,000 a day pre-war with only 35% of the population vaccinated.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is also red on the WHO's list, as refugees cope with unthinkable trauma.

Katya, in Warsaw, understands that. She broke down as she explained the arduous 24-hour journey she made with her sick daughter to reach the Polish capital.

Her husband and three other children remain in Ukraine, and she is desperately worried for them, as well as about how Alinka will recover from the trip and get the treatment she needs.

Katya said that what has happened to Ukraine in recent weeks is hard enough for a healthy adult to cope with, but the pressure on a sick child is unthinkable.

"You have to hold on," she said.

HEADLINE	03/07 Retirement funds brace for losses
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-retirement-funds-heavy-on-stocks-brace-for-losses-11646601597
GIST	<p>Volatile stock markets are eroding the retirement savings of America's teachers and firefighters after public pension systems ended last year with equity holdings at a 10-year high.</p> <p>Public pension funds had a median 61% of their assets in stocks as of Dec. 31, up from 54% 10 years ago, according to Wilshire Trust Universe Comparison Service. Since then, the Russia-Ukraine War and expectations that the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates this month have battered equity prices, reducing those holdings by billions of dollars.</p> <p>At the nation's largest pension fund, the California Public Employees' Retirement System, total reported holdings have fallen to \$475 billion as of March 2 from \$482 billion at the end of January. The S&P 500's total return was minus 2.71% during the same period. Roughly half of the California worker fund is in stocks.</p> <p>The situation highlights public retirement funds' enduring dependence on the stock market and the potential impact on local government services and municipal-bond prices if losses continue. Smaller retirement systems tend to rely even more heavily on stocks than larger ones, which are more likely to seek returns from private-market assets like infrastructure and private equity.</p> <p>U.S. state and local government pension funds control more than \$4 trillion in public-worker retirement savings but will need hundreds of billions of additional dollars to cover promised future benefits. Over the past 12 years, blockbuster stock performance has swelled pension coffers, bringing state and local governments closer to being able to cover those liabilities and taking some of the pressure off taxpayers already burdened by high pension costs.</p> <p>A downturn, however, could ultimately squeeze state and local budgets. That is because when pension-fund returns fall short, the workers and government employers that pay into them end up helping to make up the shortfall. Annual pension contributions are already a drag on the finances of some cities and states, leaving less money for operations and debt payments and leading to credit-rating downgrades.</p> <p>Research firm Municipal Market Analytics views a sustained market correction as the biggest threat to state and local general-obligation-bond prices.</p> <p>"State pensions often have an allocation to equities that is greater than the size of [the states'] annual budgets, so a correction in equity prices can ultimately have an outsize impact on the state," said Municipal Market Analytics partner Matt Fabian.</p> <p>States and cities cut services, laid off workers and rolled back benefits for new employees after the 2007-09 recession took a huge bite out of U.S. public-pension-fund holdings.</p> <p>Government finances today are far from that type of austerity scenario. With the S&P 500 returning double-digit gains in nine of the past 12 calendar years, pension funds have built back their holdings. Over the past two years, federal Covid-19 aid and rising tax revenues from the stimulus-fueled economic boom have bolstered municipal budgets.</p> <p>Pension managers and trustees regularly pore over market projections in an attempt to distribute money in ways that will both insulate their funds against downturns and deliver ambitious long-term gains. Some pension funds missed out on gains by rolling back stock allocations in the years before the pandemic. Many reaped big returns from the stimulus-fueled economic boom that followed. Now many retirement systems are paring back equities targets in response to projections about dimming stock-market returns.</p> <p>When Angela Miller-May took over as investment chief of the \$57 billion Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund in August, U.S. stocks were 44% of the portfolio, above the fund's 39% target. Her team worked to</p>

	<p>rebalance the portfolio, shifting funds into other asset classes, and trimming the holdings to approximately 42.4% by November.</p> <p>“Uncertainty and market volatility have impacted almost every fund and continue to be a concern along with expectations of muted returns moving forward,” Ms. Miller-May said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 UN: 2M flee embattled Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-europe-united-nations-evacuations-62fa232dcb9d6260fef0e9c7f5386f9a
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Buses carried civilians out of one embattled Ukrainian city Tuesday and supplies toward another, as officials tried to move people away from a Russian onslaught and ease the dire humanitarian situation for those still stuck. But reports of renewed Russian attacks in one area threatened to again derail those efforts.</p> <p>On the 13th day of the invasion, Europe’s worst refugee crisis since World War II grew even more severe, with U.N. officials reporting that 2 million people have now fled Ukraine.</p> <p>Demands for ways to safety evacuate civilians have surged along with intensifying shelling by Russian forces, who have made significant advances in southern Ukraine but stalled in some other regions. Efforts to put in place cease-fires along humanitarian corridors have repeatedly failed amid Russian shelling.</p> <p>Since the invasion began, more than 400 civilian deaths have been recorded by the U.N. human rights office, which said the true number is much higher. In addition to humanitarian disaster unfolding in Ukraine, the fighting has sent energy prices surging worldwide and stocks plummeting, and threatened the food supply and livelihoods of people around the globe who rely on crops farmed in the fertile Black Sea region.</p> <p>Western countries have decried the invasion and sought to support Ukraine with weapons — and punish Vladimir Putin’s Russia with sanctions. The measures have dealt a blow to the Russian economy, as companies pull out of or sharply curtail their business there. In a further sign of the country’s economic isolation, Shell announced Tuesday it would stop buying oil and natural gas from it.</p> <p>On Tuesday, a convoy of buses packed with people moved along a snowy road from the northeastern city of Sumy, according to video from the Ukrainian communications agency. Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said they were headed southwest to the Ukrainian city of Poltava, and included students from India and China.</p> <p>Meanwhile, buses emblazoned with red cross symbols carrying water, basic food staples, and medicines moved toward the besieged southern port of Mariupol, scene of some of the worst desperation of the war. Vereshchuk said the vehicles would then ferry civilians out of the city.</p> <p>But soon after officials announced that buses were en route, the Ukrainian president’s office said it had been informed of shelling on the escape route. It is unclear whether the supply convoy made it to Mariupol — or whether civilians will freely board the buses if the shelling continues.</p> <p>The mayor also cast doubt on the evacuations, telling the BBC that Russian forces continued to bombard area where people were trying to gather. He said some roads were blocked, others were mined.</p> <p>“This morning the situation did not change,” Orlov told the BBC. “So we still have ... a city in blockade.”</p> <p>The situation was growing more and more untenable in the city, which is without water, heat, sanitary systems or phones. Russia on Monday destroyed the natural gas supply.</p>

The battle for Mariupol is crucial because its capture could allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. An estimated 200,000 people — nearly half the population of 430,000 — hope to flee.

Vereshchuk, the deputy prime minister, said Ukraine was also making arrangements to get people out of the Kyiv suburb of Irpin, although it was not clear if that would be along one of the five official corridors the Russians promised.

There were few signs, in fact, those routes were actually being used, beyond the evacuation from Sumy.

Ukrainian officials had pushed back on the proposals, since several of the routes would funnel people into Russia or its ally Belarus, which was served as a launch pad for the invasion. They have called instead for corridors allowing people to head to western parts of Ukraine not under attack.

“Ukraine has not given permission for evacuation to Russia, we did not agree on those routes. The corridors to Russia have not been agreed upon with the Red Cross either,” said Vereschchuk.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called Tuesday for the expansion of humanitarian corridors, and more support from the Red Cross.

In a video address from an undisclosed location, he said a child died of dehydration in Mariupol, in a sign of how desperate the city’s population has become.

He said there was no firm agreement on the route out of Mariupol, so “Russian troops can simply shoot on this transport on the way.”

Zelenskyy accused the International Red Cross of “forbidding the use of its emblem on our cars,” but did not give details. Videos of buses heading out of Sumy and toward Mariupol have had signs with a red cross on the side but it’s not clear who pasted them there.

The president again pleaded for air support from Western countries. A top U.S. official said multiple countries were discussing whether to provide warplanes to Ukraine.

Ukraine’s general staff of the armed forces said in a statement Tuesday that Ukrainian forces are continuing defense operations in the suburbs of Mariupol.

The general staff said “demoralized” Russian forces are engaging in looting in places they have occupied, commandeering civilian buildings like farm hangars for military equipment, and are setting up firing positions in populated areas. The claims could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian defense forces were also involved in operations in Chernihiv and the outskirts of Kyiv, the general staff said.

In Kyiv, soldiers and volunteers have built hundreds of checkpoints to protect the city of nearly 4 million, often using sandbags, stacked tires and spiked cables. Some barricades looked significant, with heavy concrete slabs and sandbags piled more than two stories high, while others appeared more haphazard, with hundreds of books used to weigh down stacks of tires.

“Every house, every street, every checkpoint, we will fight to the death if necessary,” said Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

On Monday, Moscow again announced a series of demands to stop the invasion, including that Ukraine recognize Crimea as part of Russia and recognize the eastern regions controlled by Moscow-supported separatist fighters as independent. It also insisted that Ukraine change its constitution to guarantee it won’t join international bodies like NATO and the EU. Ukraine has already rejected those demands.

HEADLINE	03/07 Kyiv suburbs people trapped, desperate
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/in-kyiv-e2-80-99s-middle-class-suburbs-desperate-people-are-trapped/ar-AAUJKf?ocid=uxbndlbing
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- A cluster of towns built among fir and oak woodlands to the northwest of Kyiv have long attracted the capital's middle class. Now they've been turned into places of utter desperation.</p> <p>Russian forces encroaching on Kyiv in a bid to encircle the city of 2.9 million have flooded into the suburban towns whose names are fast becoming synonymous with suffering.</p> <p>From the first day of the invasion ordered by President Vladimir Putin, Russian troops aimed for Hostomel, which hosts a strategic airfield used by the world's largest airplane, the An-225 "Mriya," or "Dream," now destroyed. Heavy fighting soon engulfed the nearby towns of Irpin, Bucha and Vorzel. Thousands of residents are trapped in the basements of their homes and villas, fearing for their lives.</p> <p>As Ukraine tries to establish localized cease-fires to allow the evacuation of civilians, the people of these once desirable neighborhoods are desperate to get out. For some, it's already too late.</p> <p>The plight of those just outside Kyiv is indicative of the toll on civilians across the country after almost two weeks of fighting. While Russia maintains it is targeting military assets, the Ukrainian government accuses the Kremlin of deliberately firing on residential areas in a bid to grind down not just Ukraine's army, but its people, too.</p> <p>In Hostomel, about 30 kilometers (18 miles) from central Kyiv, the town council head Yuriy Prylypko and his two assistants were shot while distributing food to local residents, the town's council said on Facebook Monday.</p> <p>The nearby town of Bucha is in ruins, according to Mykhaylyna Skoryk-Shkarivska, an adviser to the mayor. Mobile communications and electricity are down, and there's been no contact with Mayor Anatolii Fedoruk since midday on Saturday.</p> <p>Russia has "destroyed my life, my beloved job and is killing my friends every day and colleagues just now," Skoryk-Shkarivska wrote on Facebook Sunday.</p> <p>Humanitarian corridors</p> <p>In Irpin, which is under heavy siege by Russian forces, civilians came under live fire Sunday while evacuating. The moment was caught on camera by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty crew and posted on Facebook, showing the death of a woman and her two children, while a man was seriously injured.</p> <p>With the carnage set to mount, there was still no agreement on humanitarian corridors as of Monday, after two previous attempts to allow non-combatants to leave the southern port city of Mariupol collapsed at the weekend. The city council said Russian troops shelled the route as civilians gathered to evacuate, while Russia blamed Ukraine for the failure of the corridors.</p> <p>Ukraine rejected a Russian proposal overnight to evacuate people to Belarus and Russia, asking instead for safe passage to other areas in Ukraine. A third round of negotiations yielded more confusion, as the Ukrainian team reported limited progress while the Russian side said it expected humanitarian corridors to start operating on Tuesday.</p> <p>In Bucha, a town of about 37,000 inhabitants situated on the river of the same name, people are meanwhile hiding in their basements, seeking shelter from bombs and indiscriminate killings.</p> <p>"In our little town we don't have any army buildings but there's intense shelling daily," Oleksandr Ostapa, a Bucha resident and blogger, said in an audio message sent by Telegram in the short period when he was able to get online.</p>

	<p>Many buildings in Bucha are on fire or destroyed by missiles. People don't dare to leave their basements and haven't had any water or electricity for days.</p> <p>"We don't know if these people will be still alive in a day or two," Ostapa said.</p> <p>Russia says that it only targets military structures and is hitting them with high precision.</p> <p>In a video address on Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said that Russian forces are "holding hostage the residents of Irpin, Bucha, Hostomel and many other cities and towns, villages, which the occupiers managed to capture -- temporarily."</p> <p>Such actions, including Russian shelling of civilian areas, makes "no military sense whatsoever," he said. "Just terror."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/06 Russia military chief promised quick victory
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-military-chief-promised-quick-victory-in-ukraine-but-now-faces-a-potential-quagmire-11646582366
GIST	<p>When Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the country's nuclear forces to go on high alert last week, he looked down a long table at his defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, who nodded in assent.</p> <p>In his decade at the head of the Russian military, Mr. Shoigu, who has never been a professional soldier but holds the rank of general of the army, has worked to modernize and professionalize the armed forces, and build their image as an effective fighting machine and foreign-policy tool.</p> <p>Victories in Crimea and Syria helped propel Mr. Shoigu and the military to the center of Mr. Putin's Kremlin power structure, with an upper hand over the feared intelligence services that had previously been the main supporters of the Russian president, who is himself a former spy.</p> <p>Russian troops' failure to quickly seize Ukraine, however, has shown Mr. Shoigu's changes, while real, didn't create the fearsome fighting force he touted. Poor logistics, flawed strategy and ill-prepared troops mean any victory will be immensely costly, and an occupation hard to sustain.</p> <p>Experts on the Russian military place some of the blame on Mr. Shoigu's willingness to back Mr. Putin's plans, even if they are unrealistic. That has meant agreeing with assumptions the Ukrainian military would quickly fold in the face of a superior force and that Russian troops would be greeted as liberators.</p> <p>"Beyond Putin, this is very damning for one person in particular, and that is Sergei Shoigu," said Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CNA, a nonprofit research and analysis organization located in Arlington, Va. "By agreeing to these assumptions and this type of operation, he has essentially thrown the Russian military into a disaster."</p> <p>It is hard to predict how this plays out for Mr. Shoigu. His acquiescence to the invasion demonstrated loyalty to Mr. Putin's political objectives in Europe. But if the operation fails, the Kremlin leader would likely look for a scapegoat. "It all depends on how this all ends for Putin," said Mr. Kofman.</p> <p>Whether or not Russia prevails in Ukraine, Mr. Shoigu's initial strategy to quickly topple the Ukrainian government with minimal losses has failed. After 11 days of fighting, Russian troops have failed to take any major city and have suffered unexpectedly heavy casualties. Ukraine has gotten global support and Western sanctions are on track to cripple the Russian economy. To make up for its military setbacks, Russia has increasingly resorted to indiscriminate bombing and shelling of civilian areas.</p> <p>The 66-year-old Mr. Shoigu is one of the most popular top officials in Russia. Trained as a civil engineer, he started as head of the country's emergency management agency just before the fall of the Soviet Union. He dashed around the country tackling the multitude of crises in those years. He built a massive ministry</p>

whose efforts were packaged and promoted to the Russian people. His success led to his appointment as head of the military.

There he took a dispirited and weak military and turned it into a more modern fighting force. Heavy marketing boosted the military's reputation and drew in young men to be professional soldiers. Every spring, he paraded the military's new weapons and technology through central Moscow.

Mr. Shoigu's first success came in Crimea, when he planned a nighttime intervention by special forces to seize the peninsula. They took over government buildings in an operation that ultimately led to [the annexation of the Ukrainian territory](#) in 2014. The invasion was seen as retribution for the ouster of a pro-Russian president in Kyiv a month earlier and to protect Russia's Black Sea fleet, which had its headquarters in Crimea.

The military's power in helping Moscow achieve its aims in Syria was clear when it started its air campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2015. "The military and the ministry of defense had gained the upper hand over the foreign ministry," said Hanna Notté, senior research associate at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. She added, "You could talk to diplomats, but it wouldn't matter much."

The resurgence has made the military the primary tool of Mr. Putin's foreign policy and made Mr. Shoigu a key member of his inner circle. Mr. Shoigu was sanctioned by the U.S. and the European Union last month, along with Mr. Putin and other close associates.

"He's long been seen as the most likely successor to Putin should the latter drop dead," said Sergey Radchenko, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Rather than being a political threat, Mr. Shoigu helped boost Mr. Putin's image and his ideology, which is centered on confrontation with the West, Russian nationalism and religion. Mr. Shoigu changed the design of military uniforms to look like those introduced by Joseph Stalin to celebrate the U.S.S.R.'s victory in World War II. He attended the consecration of the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces, whose floors were made from the melted metal of Nazi German tanks captured by the Soviets.

"He understands which way political winds can be blowing and is good at echoing the values Putin obviously finds important," said Dmitry Adamsky, a professor and an expert on the Russian military at Reichman University in Israel.

The military became known for sleek, well-produced videos, using drone footage and snappy editing to show Russian victories in Syria. The Defense Ministry's official television channel, Red Star, visited Russian troops on operations in the Middle East and the Arctic, presenting them as heroes standing up for Russia's interests around the globe.

One of Mr. Shoigu's deputies made sure the defense minister received good press and would harangue journalists who criticized him. The Russian Defense Ministry didn't respond to a request for comment.

The military was also used to punish opponents of Mr. Putin, who were sent to harsh locations to do their military service. "It's seen as a kind of punishment for people who don't know how to keep their mouths shut," said a person with ties to the Defense Ministry.

As Mr. Putin elevated the military, the armed forces have cooperated with other, darker aspects of the Kremlin leader's rule. Mr. Shoigu has entered into numerous contracts with Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Kremlin-connected businessman, who has bankrolled Russia's private military company, known as Wagner.

Wagner has provided support on the ground in places like Syria, and the Defense Ministry has rewarded Mr. Prigozhin with military contracts for food services. Mr. Prigozhin didn't respond to a request for comment.

	<p>If the Ukraine invasion continues to go poorly, it could unravel years of image-building for the military and Mr. Shoigu, and show that earlier victories were less impressive than they seemed.</p> <p>Crimea is less than one-twentieth the size of Ukraine and even under Ukrainian rule, it was a stronghold of pro-Russian sentiment. And the Syrian effort was mostly aerial bombing.</p> <p>Mr. Shoigu has been one of the most visible proponents of the Russian version of events before and after the invasion of Ukraine. When the U.S. warned of an imminent Russian invasion, he said that Moscow's intelligence showed the U.S. was helping Ukraine develop nuclear weapons and that Washington was preparing for a chemical weapons attack on the Russian-backed militants in Ukraine's east.</p> <p>Last week, when it was clear the invasion wasn't going as planned, he blankly read from his prepared comments in a widely televised meeting. "The most important thing for us is to protect the Russian Federation from the military threat created by the West, which is trying to use the Ukrainian people in the fight against our country," he said to a group of officers.</p> <p>"The grouping of the armed forces of the Russian Federation will continue to carry out the special military operation until the mission put forth has been completed," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 'Shrinkflation' slims toilet paper roll
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/08/business/toilet-paper-roll-shrinking-inflation/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNNBUSINESS)Slimmed down toilet paper, fewer cookies in a bag, less conditioner in squeeze tubes.</p> <p>The changes are subtle and might evade less discerning shoppers. But retail industry experts say we could see more consumer products start shrinking in size or quantity -- or both -- because of rising costs.</p> <p>Record levels of inflation means households are paying more for everyday purchases and it's costing companies more to produce packaged items like paper products, shampoos as well as food and beverage products.</p> <p>Companies can raise prices, and many are. Others are charging customers the same price while offering less.</p> <p>Product downsizing, also known as "shrinkflation," is happening with toilet paper, said Edgar Dworsky, a former assistant attorney general in Massachusetts who is a consumer advocate and editor of website ConsumerWorld.org.</p> <p>"Downsizing happens during times of high inflation because companies that make everyday products are also paying more for raw materials, production and delivery costs," said Dworsky, who's tracking how period of high inflation impact consumer products for three decades.</p> <p>Dworsky said product downsizing is becoming increasingly prevalent, and he recently picked up on several instances of brands inconspicuously shrinking the size of their products.</p> <p>For example, Procter & Gamble's (PG) Charmin's ultra soft toilet paper 18-count mega package now contains 244 two-ply sheets, down from a previous 264 double-ply sheets per roll. And super mega rolls of the brand now display 366 sheets versus a previous 396 sheets per roll.</p> <p>"That amounts to losing the equivalent of about a roll and a half in the new 18-count package," he said. Dworsky noted the large-size toilet paper packs are most commonly stocked in stores now. "It's almost impossible to find a four-pack," he said.</p>

Although he doesn't track product prices, Dworsky said when product downsizing happens, consumers end up either paying more for less of the product or the same price but for less of it.

"This doesn't mean that every toilet paper product from Procter & Gamble will see a change. But my guess is that changes to more products are coming," he said, adding that he will have an upcoming report on other toilet paper brands.

In its most recent earnings call, Procter & Gamble executives acknowledged the company was facing a "challenging cost environment" due to continued effects of the pandemic on supply chains, a tight labor market and as "availability of materials remains stretched."

Consequently, P&G said it was [raising prices](#) to its retail customers for 10 product categories, including detergents, dryer sheets, baby and feminine care products.

In an email to CNNBUSINESS, Procter & Gamble pointed to various reasons for variations in sizes of its products and that store prices are determined solely by retailers.

"There is a cost element to innovation -- adjusting the count per pack or the package size is one way of reinvesting in this innovation while maintaining a competitive price point," the company said.

P&G said it also tailors product sizes to different retailers. So rolls may have shrunk at some stores but not others.

"At the same retailer, the assortment you find in a suburban location may vary from what is in a smaller-footprint urban retail location -- and versus what is on a retailer's website," it said.

Why "shrinkflation" happens

The "shrinkflation" phenomenon is nothing new. The practice is typically triggered when inflation surges and companies' costs go up.

When costs rise, manufacturers of consumer goods look for ways to offset the increases they are paying for commodities, transportation, labor and other expenses. They either raise prices on existing products or whittle down the sizes of existing goods, thereby increasing the price per unit of what you're getting.

Those increases are passed on to shoppers via stores, who purchase products from consumer goods companies.

Other recent examples of downsized products Dworsky noticed were Keebler Cookies. He said the Chips Deluxe with M&Ms package had gone down to 9.75 from a previous 11.3 ounce per package.

Shoppers have alerted him to new Gatorade bottles which hold less beverage -- 28 fluid ounce down 32 fluid ounce -- and a change in the packaging for Pantene conditioner to a slimmer squeeze tube that also holds two ounces less of the product.

"For consumer products companies, raising prices for consumers is the last resort. That's because price increases in stores are highly noticeable by shoppers and can influence demand," said Mark Cohen, director of retail studies and adjunct professor at Columbia University's business school.

Instead, companies make subtle adjustments to products and packaging. "For consumers, this is kind of an annoyance.... or a concern depending on the product we're talking about," said Cohen. "I do believe inflation will be here for a while and we will see such product adjustments continue to happen."

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HEADLINE	03/08 Mayor refuses Russia demand surrender
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-08-22/h_e09d49888fcb2a07b8f1a95d6f2b0faa

GIST	<p>Oleksandr Markushyn, the mayor of the Kyiv suburb of Irpin, says he has rejected a demand from Russian forces to surrender the town.</p> <p>In a Telegram account on Tuesday, Markushyn said he had received a threat on his "life and health and demanding for the complete surrender of Irpin" the previous day.</p> <p>"I'm surprised that these monsters still haven't understood -- Irpin doesn't give up, Irpin can't be bought, Irpin fights!" he said.</p> <p>"I have a counter-offer to the occupiers to leave [the] Irpin community within 24 hours and save the lives and health of several thousand Russian conscripts, whose mother, sister, daughter, grandmother and partner are waiting for them at home."</p> <p>The Russians declared a ceasefire for the Kyiv area on Tuesday. It's unclear yet whether a cessation of hostilities is being held around the Ukrainian capital.</p> <p>The UK defense ministry on Monday accused Russian forces of targeting evacuation corridors and killing "several civilians" trying to evacuate Irpin, according to the latest intelligence assessment released publicly by the department.</p> <p>The ministry noted that due to heavy fighting Irpin has been without heat, water, or electricity for several days.</p> <p>Eight civilians were killed in the midst of an evacuation of the town, Mayor Markushyn said in a statement on Telegram Sunday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Israel: Iran drones carry arms to Hamas
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-says-iran-tried-to-fly-arms-to-hamas-using-drones-11646682200
GIST	<p>Israel accused Iran of trying to use long-range drones to fly small arms to Palestinian militants in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in an evolution in Tehran's use of unmanned vehicles against its Middle East rival.</p> <p>Israeli military officials said they used F-35 jet fighters to shoot down two drones launched from Iran in March last year, marking the first time the advanced planes have been used to bring down unmanned vehicles. On Monday, nearly a year after the incident, the Israeli military released video from the F-35s showing the shoot down of the drones and details of the subsequent investigation.</p> <p>While Israel has accused Iran of using neighboring Syria, Iraq and Lebanon as launchpads for attacks on Israel, this is the first time the military charged Tehran with dispatching drones directly from Iran bound for Israel.</p> <p>One Israeli military official said Iran appeared to be carrying out trial flights to see if it could successfully use drones to carry weapons and ammunition to Palestinian militants. "We see this as a kind of test," the official said.</p> <p>Iranian officials didn't respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>Israeli officials said they waited nearly a year to publicize the information on the incidents because of regional sensitivities with its friendly neighbors. The details come as the U.S. and its allies are close to reaching an agreement to revive the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran that would free up billions in Iranian money currently frozen by international sanctions.</p> <p>Israeli officials said Monday that they were worried that Iran might try to use any new money to expand its drone development and use across the region.</p> <p>"Having more money will definitely accelerate more of both building and proliferation of these arms throughout the Middle East," the Israeli military official said.</p>

The two drones last year tried to fly into Israel from the east and south, the official said, but were shot down before entering the country. Israeli officials declined to say where the drones were shot down by Israeli pilots, but said they were targeted in coordination with neighboring countries.

The drones are able to fly 1,200 miles and upward of 20 hours, the Israeli military said.

Israeli officials said they recovered small arms and ammunition from the downed drones. They said they were able to trace parts of the drones directly back to Iran's military industry, but they provided no evidence to support that claim.

Israeli officials said they shot down another Iranian drone last May that was launched from Iraq while the Israeli military was carrying out its most recent large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip. That drone flew over Jordan and Syria before being shot down in northern Israel, the Israeli military said.

Iran and its regional allies have been methodically developing advanced drones that have been used in an array of attacks. [Iran-backed Houthi fighters](#) in Yemen have used drones to attack Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, and the United Arab Emirates capital of Abu Dhabi.

Washington and Riyadh also accused Iran of using drones as part of a complex [attack on Saudi Arabia's oil industry](#) in 2019. Last month, the Israeli military said it brought down a drone that flew over the country's northern border with Lebanon. Hezbollah also said that another one of its drones flew 40 miles into Israel last month and returned safely to Lebanon after carrying out a surveillance mission.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Gasoline price hits record high
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/gasoline-price-hits-record-high-11646730771
GIST	<p>The price for U.S. gasoline hit a record high, tracking a surge in global energy markets and showing how the war in Ukraine is having far-reaching economic consequences.</p> <p>The spiraling cost of filling up a tank adds fresh pressure on American households already dealing with the quickest inflation in decades, and could crimp economic growth by curbing spending on other items.</p> <p>The national average price for regular gasoline hit \$4.173 a gallon, surpassing the previous record of \$4.114 reached in July 2008, AAA said early Tuesday. The price was 15% higher than a week earlier and 21% higher than a month earlier, the automobile association's figures showed.</p> <p>Energy markets were already tight as the global economy rebounded from the pandemic, and gasoline prices have climbed recently as traders, shippers and financiers have shunned supplies of oil from Russia, which is the world's second-largest exporter of crude oil after Saudi Arabia, according to the International Energy Agency.</p> <p>Benchmark U.S. crude-oil futures have jumped 59% so far this year through Monday, when they settled at \$119.40 a barrel, the highest level since September 2008. In Asian trading hours Tuesday, the price rose a further 1.5% to \$121.14 a barrel.</p> <p>U.S. fuel makers also pulled back on refining oil into gasoline, diesel and other products during the pandemic-driven economic slowdown. The U.S. market has lost about one million barrels of daily gasoline-refining capacity since early 2020, when it was producing about 19 million barrels of gasoline a day.</p> <p>Gasoline prices vary significantly based on taxes and access to energy infrastructure, with average prices in some states such as California and Nevada much higher than those in others such as Texas and Oklahoma, AAA data shows.</p>

	The comparison with 2008 isn't adjusted for changes in purchasing power. Adjusting for inflation since then, the earlier record would equate to a price now of about \$5.20 a gallon, according to one estimate .
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HEADLINE	03/07 Occupied Ukraine towns: growing protests
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/occupied-ukrainian-towns-want-russian-troops-to-go-home-11646662450
GIST	<p>Days after Moscow's troops took control of the southern Ukrainian city of Melitopol, a Russian armored truck rolled through its center blasting a message from loudspeakers: Demonstrations are temporarily banned to prevent disorder.</p> <p>The next day, Saturday, thousands of locals marched through the streets waving Ukrainian flags, singing the national anthem and chanting at Russian soldiers in their native language: "Go home! Go home!"</p> <p>While Russian President Vladimir Putin's troops are bogged down in many parts of Ukraine's north amid fierce resistance, they have advanced in the south, seizing several cities and towns.</p> <p>Mr. Putin has claimed that swaths of the country, including the south, are historically Russian lands and has attempted to justify his invasion as necessary to protect local Russian speakers. But, after seizing places like Melitopol, his forces there are largely being treated as foreign occupiers rather than liberators.</p> <p>"He thought in these towns we'd be happy and meet them with Russian flags, but no one here was waiting for Russia," said Andriy Radchenko, a 41-year-old surgeon in Melitopol. "We want to demoralize them, to erode their spirit."</p> <p>Thousands protested on Saturday in other occupied cities and towns. The largest protests were in the neighboring regional capital of Kherson, where one man jumped atop a passing Russian armored vehicle and waved a large Ukrainian flag to cheers from the crowd.</p> <p>The resistance of the local population in predominantly Russian-speaking cities is a challenge to Mr. Putin. Russia's soldiers, who were told they were on a mission to liberate a brotherly nation from neo-Nazi rulers, will now have to suppress the very people they are purporting to protect.</p> <p>Occupying a country like Ukraine, with a territory larger than France and around 40 million inhabitants, would require committing immense financial and military resources, including hundreds of thousands of troops, said David Edelstein, professor of security studies of Georgetown University.</p> <p>"This is not something that goes well often," said Mr. Edelstein, a specialist on occupations. "People just don't want a foreign power occupying them and telling them how to run their societies. They start by waving flags, and at some point they pick up guns."</p> <p>A close look at the situation in Melitopol, through interviews with a half-dozen residents and analysis of videos, shows the challenge of shifting from a military takeover to an occupation.</p> <p>For the city's 150,000 residents, the war started with a rocket attack on the airport in the early hours of Feb. 24 that shook them awake.</p> <p>Within two days, Russian troops had fought their way to Melitopol, some 70 miles to the northeast of the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. Electricity, heating, and telephone and internet connections were cut in many districts. Residents huddled in cellars as fighting raged for several hours.</p> <p>When they emerged, they saw Russian tanks and troops swarming throughout their city. Stores were closed and there was little connection with the outside world.</p>

“We were seized by fear,” said one resident, a teacher and mother of two children. “We didn’t know what to do.”

The occupiers tried to cajole local authorities into collaboration, offering the mayor, Ivan Fedorov, a role in an occupation administration, according to Mr. Radchenko, the surgeon who is also a city councilor and said he spoke with Mr. Fedorov. The 33-year-old mayor refused, telling the Russians he would focus on getting the city working again and taking care of its citizens, Mr. Radchenko said.

The city slowly came back to life, even as it was largely cut off. Russian forces prevented people from leaving or entering. Electricity was restored and city authorities organized young men to patrol against looters who had emerged after the takeover.

Mr. Fedorov gave regular video updates on his Facebook page. He described the city as “temporarily occupied.” The Russians raised their flag outside municipal buildings where they based themselves, but the Ukrainian flag still flies in front of others.

Residents describe a spirit of mutual support. The teacher said a woman she didn’t know gave her and her family a 3-liter pot of borscht on the day the Russians arrived, their first warm food in days.

People in Melitopol mostly speak Russian, in part because the Soviets suppressed Ukrainian culture and mandated use of Russian. Most switch freely between the two, which are linguistically similar, and many are speaking Ukrainian as a form of passive resistance.

On March 1, three days after Russian troops took control, a few hundred people gathered in a central square for a prayer meeting. They sang the national anthem, waved Ukrainian flags and held signs including one reading: “Melitopol is our land.”

Then they began to march toward buildings where the Russian forces have based themselves. “It boiled over,” said Olga Gaisumova, a 54-year-old entrepreneur who sells children’s toys.

As they approached with their hands in the air and shouting Ukrainian slogans, Russian troops began firing, at first apparently in the air. “You are firing at unarmed people!” one man shouted, adding a curse word.

Then a young man not far from the popular pizza restaurant Celentano fell to the ground clutching his leg. “The bastards are shooting at legs!” said one man. The victim was rushed to the hospital and survived, residents said.

Protests continued. One group of several dozen, armed only with umbrellas against the rain, blocked a handful of armored vehicles. Two trucks smashed into each other as they turned tail, bringing cheers from the crowd.

Since then, protests have become a daily midday event, growing in size each day.

The Russians have made some efforts to win over the local population. A couple of Russian trucks delivered what they described as humanitarian aid to the town, including canned food. Ukrainian authorities and residents say people were bused in from Crimea to stand in line posing as grateful locals to bolster the Russian propaganda narrative.

Leaflets addressed to residents appeared. “Russia is not at war with the Ukrainian people!” one read. “Power belongs to the people, not the Kyiv junta.” The notice ordered people to stay home unless absolutely necessary and not to approach Russian soldiers or vehicles, as well as recommending Russian propaganda channels as reliable news sources.

“Are they really that dumb, or has Ukrainian intelligence infiltrated their headquarters?” wrote Tatiana Kumok, the owner of a wedding-dress shop, on Facebook. “We don’t need the leaflet to tell us that power belongs to the people, thank you.”

In his evening message Friday, Mr. Fedorov, the mayor, spoke matter-of-factly of the criminal penalties for anyone who collaborates with an enemy. “The war will end, and with absolute certainty anyone who has violated the law will answer for it,” he said, standing on a public square in front of a large flagpole bearing a Ukrainian flag.

The next day’s demonstration had a celebratory mood despite a cold wind.

A large crowd streamed along a central street. They were led by a car with its trunk and doors open, blasting out a popular Ukrainian song. A woman draped in a Ukrainian flag and wearing a garland of flowers in her hair hung out of the passenger door, pumping her fist and shouting a nationalist greeting: “Glory to the heroes!”

Residents approached soldiers and asked them why they had come to Melitopol and whether they really thought the protesters were nationalist fanatics. Soldiers, their faces covered by neck warmers, averted their eyes and remained silent.

Residents say some soldiers admit in private conversations that they don’t want to be there, but would face long prison sentences if they disobeyed orders.

Others “are zombified,” said Ms. Gaisumova. One told her, “We have come here forever, and you will go to Lviv,” a city in western Ukraine close to the border with Poland.

Still, she said, locals are ready for the long haul.

“People have energy to meet,” Ms. Gaisumova said. The Russian soldiers, she added, “are hungry, unwashed and tired.”

Mr. Fedorov on Sunday evening apologized for posting his Facebook video later than usual, saying that “those who are occupying our city” had turned off the mobile internet. He delivered good news: A van had arrived loaded with much-needed medications, including enough insulin for the city’s diabetic children until the end of the month.

“This will all end soon,” he said, “and we’ll live in peaceful, Ukrainian Melitopol.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 Global Covid death toll surpasses 6M
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/03/07/6-million-covid-deaths/
GIST	<p>Worldwide deaths from covid-19 surpassed 6 million on Monday, a grim reminder of the coronavirus’s lethality as many countries relax mask-wearing and vaccination requirements.</p> <p>Even as vaccination rates rose in parts of the world, the daily average of covid deaths stood at 9,000 during the past 28 days, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>About 4 percent of all covid deaths worldwide were recorded in the past month.</p> <p>“The idea we would get to 6 million is really inconceivable when I think back to two years ago,” said Mitchell Warren, executive director of AVAC, an HIV prevention organization that also advocates for global coronavirus vaccine equity. “Everything that has happened in the last 12 months, though, is a marker of our inability of translating the remarkable scientific progress, the remarkable product development into impact.”</p>

Experts say the 6 million total — the first deaths from the virus were reported in early 2020 — is most probably an undercount and that the public should remain on guard.

Some developing countries don't maintain registries of vital statistics, or their testing resources are limited, said Jennifer Nuzzo, a professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"I think there's a real danger in getting complacent about it, and there's a risk that as the numbers pile up, you begin to see them as just numbers as opposed to human lives lost," Nuzzo said.

In Hong Kong, she said, the health system is being overwhelmed by the omicron variant of the virus and "because they have a lot of unvaccinated elderly."

The omicron wave arrived in Asia and Eastern Europe later than in other parts of the world, and the coronavirus indicators are now higher in those regions, Nuzzo added.

And the United States is not yet out of the woods.

"Americans need to understand the sooner we get the world vaccinated, the better it will be," said Carlos del Rio, global health professor at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health. "We are still seeing over 1,000 deaths a day in the U.S. That's an unacceptably high number."

Multiple scientific [studies](#) have shown that the unvaccinated are more likely to suffer worse health outcomes from covid-19 — including harsher symptoms and higher rates of hospitalization and death — than people who receive the shots.

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that [76.5 percent of the U.S. population](#) had received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, and 65 percent had received a full course, as of Sunday.

The segment of the U.S. population that has declined vaccination has been largely unshakable, according to surveys from the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.

Liz Hamel, Kaiser Family Foundation director of public opinion and polling research, said "hardcore refusers" consistently make up 12 percent to 16 percent of people in polls since the foundation began monitoring vaccine attitudes.

"While we see a decrease in the share that say they're on the fence — the 'wait and see' category — and while we've seen a slight decrease in the people who say they'll get it if required, that group of hardcore refusers has been very consistent since the beginning," Hamel said, and it is "mainly a group that identified as Republicans."

"Being a Republican has become an even stronger predictor of being unvaccinated over time," she said. On Feb. 25, the CDC issued [updated guidance](#) for state and local officials and the public, recommending that masks be worn in public only in counties with relatively high case counts and overburdened hospitals. Almost all states had relaxed their indoor mask-wearing requirements by the time the guidance was released.

Nearly 960,000 people in the United States have died of covid, according to tracking by The Washington Post, representing almost 1 of every 6 covid deaths globally.

No matter where it happens on the map, the more the virus spreads, the more likely new variants are to emerge, said Aditi Nerurkar, a Harvard Medical School physician and lecturer on global health. The omicron variant was first detected in southern Africa late last year and quickly spread to other continents, leading to a resurgent wave of the pandemic.

	<p>Nerurkar said the new global death total showed that the United States cannot declare victory against the pandemic while the virus continues to spread across an under-vaccinated globe.</p> <p>Coronavirus indicators already were relatively high in Eastern Europe before Russia invaded Ukraine. Nerurkar said global conflicts historically have accelerated the spread of infectious diseases. Researchers say the 1918-1919 flu pandemic was worsened by global movements during World War I.</p> <p>“If you start relaxing masking, removing vaccine passport requirements, that translates to people’s daily lives, and they start believing the pandemic is over because all of these changes are happening,” Nerurkar said. “And that’s such a stark difference from what’s really happening.”</p> <p>Gavi, an alliance of international organizations promoting global vaccine equity, said the latest fatality milestone highlights how the pandemic is far from over when billions have not received a shot.</p> <p>“What is needed now is concerted action to turn vaccines into vaccinations as rapidly as possible, and to put funding in place so that lower-income countries do not again find themselves at the back of the queue when it comes to procuring vaccines in the future,” Gavi said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 WA auditors sift, track for pandemic fraud
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2022/03/wa-auditors-sift-through-waves-federal-dollars-detect-fraud
GIST	<p>When describing the immense amount of federal recovery money coming into Washington state, Sadie Armijo lifts her hand up flat in front of her face like a rapidly rising waterline. Armijo, director of state audit and special investigations at the Office of the Washington State Auditor, has watched overlapping waves of emergency pandemic relief, economic stimulus and infrastructure spending flood in over the past two years.</p> <p>"We're dealing with billions of dollars here," she said. "We almost doubled the state's federal spending in 2021."</p> <p>Before the pandemic, Washington spent about \$18 billion in federal money each year, according to a recent report. Federal support jumped to an estimated \$36.5 billion last year, completely changing the scale of auditing required.</p> <p>The State Auditor's Office typically works on the back end of government spending to ensure officials accounted for their costs properly and used the money as allowed. Auditors monitor about 2,300 different agencies and governments statewide, ranging from the city of Seattle to rural cemetery taxing districts, issuing public reports on spending practices and any violations.</p> <p>"We are the eyes," Armijo said. "We are looking to make sure that within your community, within your state, that the money is used for the right purposes, and it's going for the right reasons. Is it getting to the people who need the service?"</p> <p>With multiple federal recovery bills urgently distributing money directly to states, cities, programs and projects, government officials have had to navigate complex — and sometimes shifting — spending rules. Many small governments are facing their first audit of federal dollars. And there's still more money on the way.</p> <p>"Any time you have a massive amount of money going out," Armijo said, "... you're going to have an increase in fraud."</p> <p>The mounting demands have at times stretched the auditing staff thin and triggered backups on reporting schedules. The State Auditor's Office has asked the Legislature for an additional \$1.4 million to help cover the glut of new work, including an estimated 12,000 extra staff hours for auditing state-level agencies alone.</p>

Without extra support, the auditor's office would have to cancel or delay its oversight of high-risk transactions at some state agencies right when that examination is needed most. While Armijo said she has not seen an alarming increase in fraud yet, considering the sheer amount of money coming through, she expects it's in there waiting to be uncovered.

"In my mind, it's a little concerning that we're not seeing more fraud being reported to us," she admitted. "But we're still anticipating that we're going to see more."

An expectation of transparency

Auditor Pat McCarthy said the State Auditor's Office has had transparency and independence built in since its beginning. McCarthy answers directly to voters as an elected state official, she said, and the office must audit operations across all branches of state government, including the Office of the Governor and the Washington Supreme Court.

"The work that we do really helps government to keep a check on how they're managing the public's dollars," she said, adding, "The expectation by the public is very strong and it's very high. ... It's important for them to know we're coming in and looking at things."

The auditor's office has about 400 employees with many assigned to regional offices around the state. In its [2021 annual report](#), the office tallied 1,090 accountability audits, almost 700 financial audits and 355 federal audits completed from July 2020 through June 2021. That work identified more than \$400,000 in misappropriated money.

The most [recent statewide audit](#) that covered the first months of the pandemic through June 2020 included \$7.2 billion in COVID-19 related spending, and auditors issued 54 "findings" for improper payments, insufficient records or unmet requirements.

Auditors also conducted an [in-depth investigation](#) into fraudulent applications for state unemployment payments in 2020, uncovering a number of systemic weaknesses that contributed to the loss of more than \$646 million. The state Employment Security Department later recovered about \$370 million of the improper payments.

"We have to do a lot of extra work," McCarthy said, "because there are a lot of extra dollars coming to our state."

Some federal recovery money goes to the state before flowing down through the Legislature to specific agencies or programs, where the dollars may again trickle down to local governments and businesses. Other federal dollars go straight to the local level. Many dollars that cascade from state to local agencies will get audited twice by different teams.

"We're looking at it at the state level," Armijo said, "and in a lot of cases again at the local level to make sure it's being properly used."

Evolving guidance on spending

When scrutinizing federally backed spending, auditors must compare how officials used the money with guidance and requirements provided by the federal agencies distributing that money. Scott Woelfle, director of quality assurance and innovation at the auditor's office, said the COVID-19 crisis resulted in federal agencies pushing out a lot of money without finalizing the rules for exactly how it could be spent.

"It was rolled out as things were being developed," he said. "Guidance has come out in pieces. [Federal officials] expected people to spend that money quickly."

With some final rules coming out several months after money has been spent, Woelfle said federal agencies have asked auditors to apply whatever spending instructions were available at the time the money

was used. So auditors have had to match spending against fluctuating, point-in-time rules across an array of recovery bills.

"It's not only been an evolving situation for the people spending the money, but it's been an evolving situation for auditors," he said. "You throw in the ever-changing guidance and evolving nature of the programs as well, and it's created quite a situation the past couple of years."

The state Office of Financial Management, which provides budgeting support for the governor's office and Legislature, took on an outsized role in distributing \$2 billion in CARES Act emergency coronavirus relief funds across the state in the early months of the pandemic. Assistant Budget Director Nona Snell said that urgent effort, in addition to navigating ambiguous federal guidance, put tremendous strain on her staff.

"It was just an enormous amount of work and it was incredibly stressful because we didn't have all the rules as we were doing it," she said. "We were getting information on the fly while there was also a pandemic."

Snell said the Office of Financial Management sometimes had to make educated guesses on eligible uses and run down a flurry of legal questions. On the back end of that funding, they continue to [track those dollars](#) down through state programs and grantees known as subrecipients. The state must file quarterly expenditure reports on many of its federal grants.

Any government or agency that spends [more than \\$750,000](#) in federal money in a year must undergo a separate federal audit. With so much federal relief flowing down through the state or directly to local governments, many smaller cities have hit that threshold for the first time ever.

Kelly Collins, director of local audit at the auditor's office, said some of the small governments her division works with have struggled to keep up with reporting requirements and deadlines as they grapple with new rules while also operating remotely under pandemic operations the past two years. Those audits can involve complex requirements to monitor performance metrics or subrecipients of federal dollars.

"I think some of the grant requirements were overlooked," she said. "We're seeing several issues across the state."

Collins said her division completed 368 federal audits last year, but about 100 additional audits remained unfinished at year's end, when governments needed extensions or hit delays. Those backups pile overdue auditing on top of the already oversized work scheduled this year.

"It's just a huge amount of work," Collins said, "and we see that just carrying on."

Compliance and correction

State Auditor McCarthy said a significant part of the office's mission involves educating public agencies and helping them adopt best practices for their financial oversight. She wants her office to be a resource for good governance and transparency.

"We're helping people make sure they have confidence in the people who are running their governmental entities," she said.

King Country recently got dinged with [multiple findings](#) for failing to establish controls to ensure compliance with some federal grants and for spending funds outside an allowed time frame. Benton County had a [finding](#) for not ensuring all contractors were eligible for federal work. Auditors included recommendations on how to address those shortcomings in each county's report.

Agency officials must report any missing money or suspected fraud to the auditor's office for investigation. Armijo said direct audit work discovers only about 4% to 5% of known fraud, with most suspected misappropriations being identified by the agencies themselves.

	<p>Auditors then work with the state Attorney General's Office and law enforcement to follow up on criminal or legal consequences to theft or fraud at public agencies.</p> <p>As ongoing audits catch up with previous waves of relief dollars and additional infrastructure money streams to states, auditors across the country expect to see a rise in spending violations and fraud. Armijo said auditors will be targeting high-risk activities for review, like electronic transactions and compliance with subrecipient monitoring.</p> <p>The amount of recovery money that must pass through multiple agencies has made tracking subrecipients a widespread challenge for agencies and governments, as they distribute grants to local relief efforts. Monitoring the costs and compliance of those grantees creates a tangle of regulations and potential missteps for agencies unfamiliar with the process.</p> <p>"We know that's going to be an area," Armijo said. "It's also just a common area where pre-pandemic we would find issues. ... This is just magnified."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Ukraine: Russia hit nuclear research facility
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/4aw5n9/russian-shelling-damaged-a-nuclear-research-facility-ukraine-says
GIST	<p>A research center housing a nuclear neutron source facility held at the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology in eastern Ukraine was hit by Russian forces on Sunday, per a report from the state nuclear inspectorate.</p> <p>In a release published Sunday evening, the inspectorate called the blast “nuclear terrorism,” spelling out a list of damages: a substation, which connects the plant to the electrical grid, on which the plant runs; cables within the facility’s cooling system, which effectively prevent the plant from a meltdown; a heating line between structures in the facility; surface damages to the building that houses the structure; and windows across a number of buildings within the installation.</p> <p>“This list of damages is not complete so far. Currently, information on the consequences of the damages is being specified by the personnel,” the report reads. An updated report following further inspection located no additional damage this morning.</p> <p>The Security Service of Ukraine’s Kharkiv branch said destruction of the facility could lead to “environmental disaster,” the Kyiv Independent reported Sunday. Russian state-owned news agency TASS reported Sunday that the attacks were in fact brought on by Ukraine, a line that has since been debunked.</p> <p>The reactor, known as the NSA “Neutron Source” was built with support from the Illinois-based Argonne National Laboratory in service of an agreement signed between the U.S. and Ukraine at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C. The U.S. invested \$73 million in the project, which promised that the Kharkiv Institute of Physics and Technology would be “given the opportunity to build state-of-the-art technology in nuclear research that will contribute to ‘solving problems of nuclear power industry and extending technical lifetime of nuclear power plants,’” according to a report from the European Union Non-Proliferation Consortium.</p> <p>The attack spurred alarm globally, but Mark Hibbs, Germany-based senior fellow in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s nuclear policy program, assured Motherboard that the facility appeared to be damaged, not destroyed, and that if it had been, risk to human health would’ve been minimal.</p> <p>The facility is very small, contains only “gram amounts” of uranium (nuclear fuel), and was not designed for power generation. Rather, it produces isotopes for nuclear therapy and medical procedures, and for the training of personnel entering Ukraine’s nuclear sector. And crucially, the facility hadn’t started up yet—it was poised to start in April, and was de-fueled in anticipation of attacks from Russia before Sunday’s strike, Hibbs said.</p>

	<p>“It’s not a power reactor,” Hibbs said. Its destruction “would have been a sad and tragic loss to the nuclear program in Ukraine, but it would not have posed a human health hazard,” he said.</p> <p>Even so, the attack represents a symbolic strike on Ukraine’s nuclear sector and possibly even the U.S.’, given the close ties between the facility and American collaborators.</p> <p>“It had a variety of nuclear energy applications. It was clearly a project that involved cooperation between Ukraine and the United States,” Hibbs said. “To a certain extent, it might have been seen by attackers as a symbolic target.”</p> <p>“An attack on activities like this would be disturbing to scientists in Russia, who are involved in the same activities as in Ukraine,” he said.</p> <p>Jeff Merrifield, former member of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, told E&E News he saw the series of attacks on Ukrainian nuclear infrastructure—at the Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia nuclear facilities—as part of a wider attempt to chip away at the country’s energy security.</p> <p>“Russians want to control these plants because they want to be able to shut off the power,” Merrifield said. “They want to be able to exert that level of control.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 IAEA concern Russia control of nuclear site
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/emergency-preparedness/iaea-gravely-concerned-about-russian-military-control-of-ukraine-nuclear-plants/
GIST	<p>Reports that Ukraine’s, and Europe’s, largest nuclear power plant is under the control of Russian forces is a cause for grave concern, the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Mariano Grossi, said on Sunday.</p> <p>In a statement released by the IAEA, Mr. Grossi said he had been informed by Ukrainian authorities that, although regular staff continue to operate the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant, any action of plant management – including measures related to the technical operation of the six reactor units – requires prior approval by the Russian commander of the Russian forces that took control of the site last week.</p> <p>Mr. Grossi said that this development contravenes one of the seven pillars of nuclear safety and security that he outlined at a meeting of the IAEA’s Board of Governors on March 2: that “operating staff must be able to fulfill their safety and security duties and have the capacity to make decisions free of undue pressure”.</p> <p>Ukraine’s nuclear regulator has informed the IAEA that it is having major problems communicating with staff operating Zaporizhzhya, due to Russian forces at the site switching off some mobile networks and blocking the internet. Some mobile phone communication is understood to still be possible, albeit with poor quality, but fixed phone lines, as well as emails and fax, are reportedly no longer functioning.</p> <p>The IAEA noted that this situation contravenes another of its seven indispensable pillars of nuclear safety, that there must be “reliable communications with the regulator and others”.</p> <p>“I’m extremely concerned about these developments that were reported to me today”. Said Mr. Grossi. “Just a few days after I presented the seven main elements of nuclear safety and security to the IAEA Board, several of them are already being compromised. In order to be able to operate the plant safely and securely, management and staff must be allowed to carry out their vital duties in stable conditions without undue external interference or pressure”.</p> <p>“The deteriorating situation regarding vital communications between the regulator and the Zaporizhzhya NPP is also a source of deep concern, especially during an armed conflict that may jeopardize the</p>

country's nuclear facilities at any time", continued the Director-General. "Reliable communications between the regulator and the operator are a critical part of overall nuclear safety and security".

Despite the communication issues, the regulator was able to provide updated information about the operational status of the Zaporizhzhya NPP to the IAEA, and to confirm that radiation levels there remained normal.

Operational teams at the plant are now rotating in three shifts but, the regulator added, the availability and supply of food is limited, which is having a negative impact on staff morale.

Responding to reports that the technical staff and guards at the site of the Chornobyl nuclear accident site have not been rotated since February 23, Mr. Grossi called on the Russian forces controlling the site to allow them to be relieved by other colleagues and rest, in order to carry out their jobs safely and security.

The Ukraine regulator has informed the IAEA that communication with Chornobyl is currently limited to emails.

In another worrying development, the regulator said that all communications have been lost with the enterprises and institutions in the port city of Mariupol that use [category 1-3 radiation sources](#), and there is no information about their status. Such radioactive material, warned the IAEA, can cause serious harm to people if not secured and managed properly.

The nuclear danger in Ukraine:

- Ukraine gave up its rights to nuclear weapons following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and all the nuclear weaponry on its territory was removed by June 1996. However, the country retained the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and some 114 enterprises are believed to have nuclear materials of some kind, including four nuclear power plants (NPPs).
- The military conflict in Ukraine is the first to take place on the territory of a country with large nuclear facilities. On Thursday night, Zaporizhzhia NPP, the largest and most powerful in Europe, was shelled, raising fears of an explosion, and radiation leaks.
- Memories of the Chornobyl disaster, which occurred on April 26, 1986, have also been revived: Chornobyl was one of the most serious nuclear incidents in human history, and led to a radioactive plume covering a large part of north-eastern Europe.
- Thursday's attack on Zaporizhzhia saw shells hitting a training complex near the nuclear reactors. No radioactive material was released, and the plant's safety systems were not compromised.
- However, an accident or explosion at Zaporizhzhia, which is far bigger than Chornobyl, could lead to far more serious consequences than the 1986 incident. This could result from fresh attacks, or even a loss of electricity. The latter situation could prevent the reactor cooling system from working, and lead to an explosion (this was the cause of the Chornobyl disaster).

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HEADLINE	03/07 Lviv mayor pleads for international aid
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/7/lvivs-mayor-pleads-international-aid-refugee-crush/
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine — The mayor of Lviv on Monday called on international support as Ukraine's western bastion strains to take in floods of people fleeing advancing Russian armies.</p> <p>Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have fled to the city since the beginning of the invasion, and many expect more waves of refugees as clashes intensify in several major cities. Lviv, which so far remains well apart from the violence in center and eastern Ukraine, has emerged as a major staging center behind the front lines for the resistance to Russian forces.</p> <p>"I would like to address all of the international organizations to ask for support," Mayor Andriy Sadovyi said through a translator Monday. "We need you now, and we need you here."</p> <p>The nearly 2-week-old war in Ukraine has created the fastest-growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. More than 1.5 million have crossed the Ukrainian border into neighboring countries, where</p>

the international community has rallied to support those fleeing constant shelling and intense ground offensives.

Hundreds of thousands have fled into Lviv. The city, less than 50 miles from the Polish border, has been spared much of the heavy fighting that has overcome cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv and Mariupol. Lviv has converted more than 440 municipal buildings to house more than 200,000 refugees in recent days.

“This, of course, has put a lot of pressure on us,” Mr. Sadovyi said. “We are working to the full [extent] of our capacity.”

Mr. Sadovyi said the city has a particular need for heated tents to provide shelter.

Residents have started opening their doors to strangers. Hotels throughout Lviv are completely booked.

Most expect the humanitarian crisis to worsen. As Ukrainian and Russian negotiators haggle over cease-fires to allow civilians to escape cities in eastern Ukraine under siege, officials fear Lviv could reach a breaking point.

For now, the city serves as a welcome refuge from the worst of circumstances. With men ages 18 to 60 prohibited from leaving Ukraine, the city is often the last opportunity for families to stay together in relative safety.

Iuriy, a 51-year-old musician from Kyiv who did not want to provide his last name, fled to Lviv by train with his wife, Svitlana, 49, and their two children late last week.

The couple said they visited Lviv years ago for their anniversary and always wanted to return. “We didn’t think that we would return in such an awful time,” Iuriy said.

Still, he said, Lviv offered a small sense of normalcy in a country at war.

The picturesque city has centuries-old architecture surrounding its cobblestone central square. Many businesses that closed during the first few days of the Russian invasion had reopened by this weekend, with store shelves stocked. The long courtyard outside the opera house is again filled with people taking afternoon strolls.

“It’s almost like in normal times,” Iuriy said. “In Kyiv, the situation is awful.”

That sense of normalcy has its limits, he said, and some fear a time when there is no option but to flee the country.

The occasional air raid siren reminds those in Lviv that Ukraine is a country at war. Volunteers have begun covering the city’s statues in large white tarps and installing metal screens to protect stained-glass windows.

“Right now, the situation is calm here, for sure,” said 32-year-old Lviv resident Skladan Oksana. “But the situation is not so stable. It could change at any hour, any minute. We don’t know.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 US: Yemen rebels fired missile into Red Sea
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/7/us-navy-says-yemen-rebels-fired-missile-into-busy/
GIST	DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen’s Houthi rebels launched at least one missile into the busy waters of Red Sea over the weekend, the U.S. Navy said Monday, raising the risks of their fire striking one of the many commercial vessels using a waterway crucial to global shipping.

The Red Sea connects into the Suez Canal, which sends cargo and energy shipments from the wider Mideast onto Europe. Since seizing Yemen's capital in September 2014, the Houthis have launched missiles, deployed bomb-laden drone boats and released mines into the Red Sea.

The missile fire took place Saturday in the Red Sea, the Navy said.

"Although maritime traffic was not impacted in this instance, these actions are destabilizing and present a danger to all vessels transiting a critical international waterway," said Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for the Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet.

Spokesmen for the Iranian-backed Houthis did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Saudi Arabia, which has led a coalition battling the Houthis since March 2015 and has a coastline stretching some 1,760 kilometers (1,100 miles) along the Red Sea, also did not respond to requests for comment.

Houthi missile fire in the Red Sea has come near an American warship before. In October 2016, the U.S. Navy said the USS Mason came under fire from two missiles launched out of Yemen. Neither reached the warship, though the U.S. retaliated with Tomahawk cruise missile strikes on three coastal radar sites in Houthi-controlled territory on Yemen's Red Sea coast.

The week before, the Emirati vessel SWIFT-1 came under Houthi missile attack. The Emirati government asserted the SWIFT-1 at the time carried humanitarian aid; U.N. experts later said of the claim that they were "unconvinced of its veracity." The vessel had been sailing back and forth in the Red Sea between an Emirati troop base in Eritrea and Yemen.

In April 2021, an Iranian cargo ship that is said to serve as a floating base for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard forces came under attack in the Red Sea - likely part of a wider shadow war between Israel and Tehran.

More recently in January, the Houthis seized the Emirati-flagged ship Rwabee in the Red Sea off Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition asserted the ship carried medical equipment from a dismantled Saudi field hospital. The Houthis released video showing military-style inflatable rafts, trucks and other vehicles on the vessel, as well as rifles.

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HEADLINE	03/08 Russia threatens Europe gas supplies
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/russia-threatens-europes-gas-supplies-as-west-mulls-oil-import-ban-over-ukraine-invasion
GIST	<p>Moscow has stoked fears of an energy war by threatening to close a major gas pipeline to Germany after the US pushed its European allies to consider banning Russian oil imports over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>In an address on Russian state television, Russian deputy prime minister Alexander Novak said: "A rejection of Russian oil would lead to catastrophic consequences for the global market", and claimed the price of oil could rise to more than US\$300 a barrel.</p> <p>Novak cited Germany's decision last month to halt the certification of Nord Stream 2, a secondary pipeline, saying: "We have every right to take a matching decision and impose an embargo on gas pumping through the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline."</p> <p>He claimed it would be impossible to quickly find a replacement for Russian oil on the European market. "It will take years, and it will still be much more expensive for European consumers. Ultimately, they will be hurt the worst by this outcome," he said.</p> <p>Analysts at Bank of America have said prices could reach US\$200 a barrel if most of Russia's exports were cut off, and oil prices hit near 14-year highs on Tuesday, with Brent crude futures reaching as high as \$125.19 a barrel.</p>

	<p>Novak's threat refers to the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline to Germany and follows comments by the European Commission's climate policy chief that the EU could wean itself off Russian gas within years and start curbing its reliance within months.</p> <p>"It's not easy, but it's feasible," Frans Timmermans told the European parliament's environment committee on Monday. Russia supplies about 40% of Europe's gas.</p> <p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered energy security concerns and the European Commission will on Tuesday propose plans to diversify Europe's fossil fuel supplies away from Russia and move faster to renewable energy.</p> <p>Joe Biden held a video conference call with the leaders of France, Germany and Britain on Monday as he pushed for their support to ban Russian oil imports. The US was however willing to move ahead without its European allies, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters.</p> <p>The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, revealed the idea was gaining traction in the White House and had been the subject of "very active discussion". Boris Johnson attracted criticism after saying the UK may have to increase its domestic gas and oil production.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 China students flee; criticize embassy
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/chinese-students-fled-ukraine-condemn-embassy-response
GIST	<p>Immediately after Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, Yang, a 22-year-old classical music student in Kyiv, called the Chinese embassy in the city to seek help. He tried several times but the line was engaged.</p> <p>"I don't know why the embassy didn't tell us the war was going to break out when other countries advised their citizens to leave days before," he said. Yang then followed his university's emergency protocols and took refuge in a bomb shelter. Days later an escape route began to circulate among his friends. He decided to follow the instruction and flee on his own.</p> <p>Almost two weeks before Russia acted – described by the Chinese media as "special military operations" – countries including the UK and Canada advised their nationals to leave Ukraine. But in the case of China, which had nearly 6,000 nationals in the country, it was not until the day after the war broke out that the embassy advised its citizens to leave.</p> <p>"By the time they knew [the war was to break out], it was already too late to evacuate," said Yun Sun, the director of the China programme at the Stimson Center in Washington. Until the war broke out, many high-profile Chinese pundits and news outlets had insisted western prediction of an invasion was "fake news".</p> <p>China said on Monday most of its nationals had left Ukraine. At the annual press conference with Chinese and foreign journalists in Beijing on the same day, the foreign minister, Wang Yi, told millions of its citizens abroad that the country "is always at your back" in answering a question from the Xinhua news agency. The answer was later widely publicised across Chinese media.</p> <p>However, while state media praised the diplomatic mission for its work, its response since the war has also drawn much criticism from some Ukraine-based Chinese students, who spent days trapped in bomb shelters in a war-stricken foreign country. They say the embassy's slow advice and confusing messaging – including advising them to display a Chinese flag on their vehicles, then a day later telling them "not to display identifying symbols" – contrasted with the image of order and control Beijing had been trying to project over the years.</p>

“For a long time, Chinese state agencies as well as state-sponsored media have adopted an opportunistic approach to use every event as an opportunity to advance propaganda goals,” said Ling Li, an expert in Chinese politics and law at the University of Vienna.

“This is exactly what happened when the embassy rescinded its previous advice after realising how negatively an expressive pro-Russia position is viewed by the Ukrainians and the international community, which was apparently not considered at all when it hastily issued its first advice.”

On Tuesday, a staffer at the embassy told the Guardian to find other means to contact the embassy for a response to this article, as his line was for Ukraine-based Chinese nationals only. But asked which department could respond to media inquiries, he said the embassy did not have such a department. The embassy said last week it began to evacuate the first batch of Chinese nationals in the late evening of 28 February. And in [an interview with the Beijing-based Global Times](#) on the same day, an official explained the logistical challenge in withdrawing citizens while the war was raging.

A fraught and lonely escape

Last Tuesday, an anxious Chinese student in Kyiv posted on social media a recording of her desperate call to an embassy staffer, in which she was told to remain sheltered in place or board a train to Lviv by herself. She was trolled by unsympathetic nationalists online before deleting the post.

Yang’s escape was not smooth, either. At 7am on 1 March, he followed the escape route and ventured out to a Kyiv train station. “The station was clogged with people desperately trying to leave,” he said. “Luckily, I finally got on to a train. On the platform, men saw off their children and wives. It was a scene I had only seen in films. I’ll never forget it.”

He said he then spent 10 hours standing in a packed train compartment. En route, he realised he had escaped Kyiv in such a rush that he had left his two beloved cellos behind. For the past five years, the instruments had been with him touring around China and Ukraine. His computer was in the bomb shelter, too. He carried only a bag with his passport, a few clothes and bank cards. His destination: Lviv in western Ukraine, then Poland.

Yang was lucky. On 1 March, a Chinese national was shot and injured while attempting to flee eastern Ukraine, [according to state media](#). A day earlier, a foreign ministry spokesperson said Beijing was “[making all feasible plans to help Chinese citizens in Ukraine leave the country](#)”. On its [official website](#) and [social media account](#), the embassy began to issue multiple evacuation instructions and open letters, including one that clarified the ambassador was still in Kyiv to help on the evening of 26 February – after the war broke out.

To Luo, 23, another Chinese student who wishes to remain anonymous, the official plan came too late. Having not heard from his embassy for days, Luo jumped on a motorcycle to leave Kyiv with his Iranian classmate as soon as the war broke out on 24 February.

They first stopped at a mutual friend’s house in a small village to recharge and figure out a detailed plan after more than 24 hours on the road. Finally, on 28 February, they got to Lviv and found a car to head to Medyka, in south-east Poland, bordering Ukraine.

But halfway to the Polish border, the traffic jam forced them to abandon the car. “So we decided to go to the border on foot,” Luo said. It was 3pm when they began to walk. They finally arrived at the border at 6am the next day.

At the border, they saw two long queues: one for Ukraine nationals, mostly women, children and elderly people, and the other for foreigners, mostly Indians and north Africans, Luo said. A day later, on 2 March, Luo and his classmate finally crossed the border, thanks to an [announcement](#) by Warsaw two days earlier that allowed Chinese nationals to enter Poland without a Schengen visa.

	<p>Yang and Luo are safe in Poland after their ordeal. The first two flights carrying evacuees landed in China on Saturday, according to state media. But Luo said he hoped to remain in Poland because tickets to China were “way too expensive”.</p> <p>“I don’t understand. China gives hundreds of millions of dollars to developing countries every year but they don’t financially help their citizens who were forced to escape [to] go back home,” Luo said. “I had never thought this would have happened to me.”</p> <p>Yang, who took a Covid acid test on Sunday as a part of the pre-departure requirement, has sorted out his ticket and is looking forward to heading back home to southern China in the coming days. On Monday morning, he called his 70-year-old cello professor, who decided to stay in Ukraine, to check if he was all right.</p> <p>“I said goodbye to him. I promised him that when the war is over, I’ll come back to sit in your class again to finish my education.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 Ukraine: second Russian general killed
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/vitaly-gerasimov-second-russian-general-killed-ukraine-defence-ministry-claims
GIST	<p>A Russian general has been killed in fighting around Kharkiv, Ukrainian intelligence has claimed, which would make him the second general the Russian army has lost in Ukraine in a week.</p> <p>The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian defence ministry said Maj Gen Vitaly Gerasimov, chief of staff of the 41st Army, had been killed outside the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, along with other senior officers.</p> <p>The ministry also broadcast what it claimed was a conversation between two Russian FSB officers discussing the death and complaining that their secure communications were no longer functioning inside Ukraine.</p> <p>The investigative journalism agency Bellingcat said it had confirmed Gerasimov’s death with a Russian source. Its executive director, Christo Grozev, said they had also identified the senior FSB officer in the intercepted conversation.</p> <p>Gerasimov took part in the second Chechen war, the Russian military operation in Syria, and the annexation of Crimea, winning medals from those campaigns.</p> <p>If confirmed, Gerasimov would be the second Russian general from the 41st Army to die within a week in Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. At the beginning of March, its deputy commander, Major General Andrei Sukhovetsky, was confirmed by Russian media to have been killed.</p> <p>The loss of top ranking officers has come at a time when much of Putin’s invasion force has become bogged down by logistical problems, poor morale and Ukrainian resistance. The failure of its encrypted communications system could be another severe blow.</p> <p>“In the call, you hear the Ukraine-based FSB officer ask his boss if he can talk via the secure Era system. The boss says Era is not working,” Grozev said on Twitter. “Era is a super expensive cryptophone system that [Russia’s defence ministry] introduced in 2021 with great fanfare. It guaranteed [to] work ‘in all conditions’.”</p> <p>On Tuesday, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said the war was “like a nightmare” for Russia and hailed the Ukrainian resistance effort.</p>

	His comments came after Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the United Nations, accused Vladimir Putin of having a plan to “brutalise Ukraine” by shelling cities.
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HEADLINE	03/08 Day 13 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-13-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, again accused Russia of attacking fleeing civilians. Earlier on Monday his government rejected an offer from Moscow to create “humanitarian corridors” for the escape of civilians after it emerged that most of the supposedly safe routes led directly to Russia or Belarus. He accused Moscow of “medieval” tactics. • Zelenskiy rallied the nation in a fresh late-night video address, saying “You do not back down. We do not back down”, adding that “heroic” resistance was making the war “like a nightmare” for Russia. Taking viewers on a tour of his quarters in Kyiv, he promised to stay in the capital until the war was won. • A senior Russian general has been killed in fighting in Kharkiv, according to Ukraine’s defence ministry. It said its forces killed Maj Gen Vitaly Gerasimov, believed to have been first deputy commander of Russia’s 41st army. • The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine is deepening as Russian forces intensify their attacks, while food, water, heat and medicine grow increasingly scarce. Some 1.7 million Ukrainians are thought to have fled the fighting and the total could reach 5 million, the EU said. • Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the United Nations, accused Vladimir Putin of having a plan “to brutalize Ukraine”, as the UN tries to negotiate evacuation corridors. Russia’s ambassador hit back, claiming Ukrainians are shelling themselves. • Britain’s home secretary is under fire for the country’s “chaotic policy” towards Ukrainians seeking refuge in the UK. Only 300 have been granted asylum so far. • Zelenskiy will address UK MPs on Tuesday via videolink and is expected to plead for more arms and a no-fly zone over Ukraine to be enforced by Nato. • China’s foreign minister has called the country’s relationship with Russia “iron clad” as Beijing continues to refuse to condemn the invasion of Ukraine despite growing pressure from the US and European Union to use its influence to rein in Moscow.
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HEADLINE	03/07 Wall Street biggest drop in over a year
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/07/wall-street-slide-stock-market-oil-prices-surge
GIST	<p>Wall Street had its biggest drop in more than a year Monday as another leap for oil prices threatened to squeeze inflation’s grip on the global economy.</p> <p>The S&P 500 fell 3%, its biggest decline in 16 months, after a barrel of US oil surged to \$130 overnight on the possibility the US could bar imports from Russia. Stocks around the world also fell earlier in the day, taking their cue from oil’s movements, though their losses moderated as crude receded toward \$120 per barrel.</p> <p>The benchmark S&P 500 fell 122.78 points to 4,201.09. The Dow Jones fell 797.42 points, or 2.4%, to 32,817.38.</p> <p>The Nasdaq composite slid 482.48 points, or 3.6%, to 12,830.96. The tech-heavy index is now 20.1% below its record set in November. Such a decline means the index is now in what Wall Street calls a bear market. The S&P 500 is down 12.4% from the peak it set in early January.</p> <p>Oil prices have soared recently on worries that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will upend already tight supplies. Russia is one of the world’s largest energy producers, and oil prices were already high before the attack because the global economy is demanding more fuel following its coronavirus-caused shutdown.</p>

Markets worldwide have swung wildly recently on worries about how high prices for oil, wheat and other commodities produced in the region will go because of Russia's invasion, inflaming the world's already high inflation. In the United States, prices for consumers jumped last month from their year-ago level at the fastest rate in four decades.

The conflict in Ukraine also threatens the food supply in some regions, including Europe, Africa and Asia, which rely on the vast, fertile farmlands of the Black Sea region, known as the "breadbasket of the world."

The war puts extra pressure on central banks around the world, with the Federal Reserve on course to raise interest rates later this month for the first time since 2018. Higher rates slow the economy, which hopefully will help rein in high inflation. But if the Fed raises rates too high, it risks forcing the economy into a recession.

Some investors have seen the war in Ukraine as potentially pushing the Fed to go easier on rate increases. Investors love low rates because they tend to boost prices for stocks and all kinds of markets.

But that may not necessarily be the case this time, Goldman Sachs economists wrote in a report. With prices for oil, wheat and other commodities potentially rising even more, the threat is higher for a sustained, high inflation to settle on the economy. That could flip the Fed's traditional playbook.

Beyond sanctions brought on Russia by governments because of its invasion of Ukraine, companies are also levying their own punishments. The list of companies exiting Russia has grown to include Mastercard, Visa and American Express, as well as Netflix.

The value of the Russian ruble continued to slide amid all the financial pressure, falling 12% to 0.7 cents.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Russia pummels civilian targets
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-pummels-ukrainian-civilian-targets-ahead-of-talks-11646645852
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine—Ukrainian and Russian negotiators ended a third round of talks Monday with little progress, while Ukraine's military held fast along several fronts and Russia continued to shell cities and residential areas.</p> <p>Continuing campaigns to encircle Ukrainian cities, Russian forces conducted missile and rocket strikes on cities and military targets in the country's north and south, disrupting plans to evacuate civilians via humanitarian corridors, Ukrainian officials said. Ukrainian forces continued to frustrate Russia with counterattacks and sabotage operations.</p> <p>In the 12 days since the start of the invasion, Russia's failure to capture major cities and its mounting loss of aircraft and armored vehicles have increased pressure on Moscow in a war that has drawn global condemnation and sanctions.</p> <p>In a third round of talks, held in neighboring Belarus, a Ukrainian negotiator said his team and their Russian counterparts agreed on some logistical workings to help people trapped in the fighting after earlier agreements to allow civilians to flee collapsed.</p> <p>"We will receive more effective assistance to people who are currently suffering from Russian aggression," Mikhail Podolyak, a Ukrainian negotiator and presidential aide, said on Twitter, without providing details.</p> <p>Mr. Podolyak said that negotiators, however, achieved little else though agreed to continue consultations to reach a cease-fire. The assessment was shared by a Russian negotiator, who said his side wasn't satisfied with the outcome.</p> <p>"It has not been going easy and it's too soon to talk of something positive," Russia's lead negotiator and Kremlin aide Vladimir Medinsky was quoted by the Russian news agency Interfax as saying.</p>

Foreign ministers of both countries are set to meet on Thursday in a Turkish resort city, Turkey said.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who has spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin several times during the crisis, including on Sunday, expressed pessimism about talks in the near term.

“I do not think that in the days and weeks to come, there will be a real negotiated solution,” he said at a campaign event in France. “Discussions with President Putin are difficult because today he refuses a cease-fire.”

Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China, [whose government has supported Russia](#) while also calling for negotiations, said Beijing would work with the international community to provide “necessary mediation” when required.

With Ukraine’s ability to withstand the barrage amid increasing shortages of food, medicine and other supplies in question, President Volodymyr Zelensky, in separate calls with President Biden, U.K. Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, pressed his case for increased sanctions against Russia and the implementation of a no-fly zone over his country.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has [rejected requests](#) for a no-fly zone, saying it would risk war with Russia—an outcome that Mr. Putin has threatened if any NATO members [enter the conflict](#).

In a media briefing Monday, Mr. Zelensky called for a new package of sanctions and an embargo on Russian oil. “You can call this an embargo,” he said. “Or you can call this just morality, when you refuse to give money to a terrorist. Let the war feed them.”

The White House said an embargo was under consideration, [causing oil prices to soar](#) above \$135 a barrel on global markets before falling to just above \$124. Mr. Biden and the leaders of France, Germany and the U.K. in a call “affirmed their determination to continue raising the costs on Russia” for invading Ukraine, the White House said.

Separately, Mr. Johnson said that a total oil embargo on Russia wasn’t feasible. “We can’t simply close down the use of oil and gas overnight,” he said in remarks to reporters in London. Instead he said European nations would work to reduce dependence on Russian energy.

Mr. Putin spoke Monday with the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, asserting—contrary to evidence of deadly Russian attacks on civilians in Ukraine—that the Russian military was taking steps to save civilian lives, and accusing Kyiv of obstructing those efforts, according to the Kremlin’s account of the phone call.

In an interview Monday with ABC News, Mr. Zelensky suggested that the question of whether Mr. Putin [is deliberately targeting civilians](#) is irrelevant: “Why would I care? The result is the same.”

Roughly [1.7 million people have fled Ukraine](#), mostly women and children, the U.N.’s refugee agency said on Twitter Monday.

Outside Kyiv, Russian forces shot and killed Yuri Prylypko, the mayor of Hostomel, and two people who were helping him distribute food and medicine, according to the local government’s Facebook page. Hostomel was the [site of fierce fighting](#) in the war’s early days.

In Kharkiv, near the Russian border, Russia intensified attacks on civilian targets, pressing to subdue a city, Ukraine’s second largest, that remains in Ukrainian control after days of fierce bombardment.

Russia’s concentrated strikes on civilian sites overnight in Kharkiv killed eight people and set more than 20 buildings ablaze, emergency services said. A Ukrainian counteroffensive retook a town on the outskirts of the city, with Ukrainian officials saying two Russian colonels were killed in the operation.

Kharkiv's national police office said Monday that 209 people, including 133 civilians, had died so far in the attacks since Russia launched its invasion on Feb. 24.

A school in the northern city of Chernihiv was destroyed in shelling overnight, Ukraine's emergency service said, while regional officials in Vinnytsia, a city to the south, raised the death toll from a Sunday cruise missile attack to nine, including five civilians.

Elsewhere, Russia has been consolidating gains. In Irpin, to Kyiv's west, where residents have been [without food and water](#) for three days, Russia moved in tanks and motorized infantry units in a sign of what may be in store for the capital. Ukraine's government said 2,000 civilians were safely evacuated from Irpin on Monday.

Russia continued efforts to subdue cities and towns in the Ukrainian south, piecing together a land bridge to the Crimean Peninsula and choking off Ukraine's access to the Black and Azov Seas.

Russian forces have nearly encircled the Azov Sea port city of Mariupol, trapping civilians. Aid group Doctors Without Borders described the humanitarian situation in the city as catastrophic. In the nearby city of Melitopol, Russian forces took the main TV and radio tower, the city's mayor said.

With food supplies threatened across the country, Ukraine banned exports of staples such as rye, oats, buckwheat, salt and sugar.

During the night, Russia assaulted an airport outside the southern port city of Mykolaiv, using Smerch multiple-rocket launchers to pound civilian targets.

Kyiv said Ukrainian forces had destroyed 30 Russian helicopters at an airfield near Kherson, a Russian-occupied city in southern Ukraine.

Missiles launched from Russian ships in the Black Sea struck infrastructure in Tuzla, south of the port city of Odessa, which Mr. Zelensky said is the target of a Russian offensive, according to plans he said Ukraine has obtained. Russian ships were regrouping on the Black Sea, according to a Ukrainian official in Odessa.

"We know that Russian troops are actively preparing to attack Odessa," said Mr. Podolyak. "They have already tried to implement this plan. But our defense has managed to hold them back."

A Ukrainian official in Odessa said Monday Ukrainian forces struck a Russian vessel in the Black Sea. Images on social media appeared to confirm the strike.

Ukrainian railways scheduled an additional evacuation train out of Odessa for Monday.

In the country's east, Ukraine blunted a Russian advance in the Luhansk region, trading artillery blasts and killing nearly 40 soldiers and hitting an oil depot, Ukrainian Interfax news service reported.

Also Monday, the Kremlin announced a list of what it called unfriendly countries, including the U.S., the U.K., Japan, Micronesia and Singapore. A Russian government plane left New York carrying a dozen United Nations diplomats that the U.S. last week ordered expelled.

Ukraine continued to muster international support. The United Arab Emirates said it had flown 30 tons of aid and medical supplies to Poland Monday for ground transport to Ukraine.

The U.K. announced a \$100 million grant to help pay Ukrainian pensions and public-sector salaries, and the U.S., with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.K. called on Interpol to suspend Russian membership.

	“We decide the future of the continent with our resistance and our friends decide it with their help,” Mr. Zelensky said.
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HEADLINE	03/07 Second round free at-home Covid tests
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/07/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#the-white-house-said-it-is-offering-a-second-round-of-free-coronavirus-tests-to-all-americans
GIST	<p>The White House on Monday said that it would begin offering a second round of four free at-home coronavirus tests to all American households, delivering on a pledge President Biden made last week in his State of the Union address, when he framed the offer as part of a broader effort to stay ahead of possible outbreaks and new variants.</p> <p>The administration is reopening eligibility this week “so we’re prepared no matter what Covid-19 brings,” Mr. Biden said in a brief video the White House posted. A White House spokesman described the announcement as a “soft launch” ahead of a more formal rollout of the free tests on Tuesday. Like the first round, the tests would be delivered through the U.S. Postal Service.</p> <p>The kits, which can be ordered through the same federal website — covidtests.gov — are part of a program Mr. Biden announced in December that swelled from 500 million to one billion, some of which may eventually be used outside of the mail program, White House officials said.</p> <p>Dr. Tom Inglesby, the White House testing coordinator, said in an interview Monday that over 275 million tests had been delivered to nearly 69 million households as part of the Postal Service program — more than half of U.S. households. The program’s logistical apparatus, he said, was sprawling, with over 5,000 Postal Service employees in fulfillment centers packing and shipping the tests each day.</p> <p>“This is the largest government effort of its kind, ever,” he said.</p> <p>When Mr. Biden announced the program, public health experts criticized the White House as slow to recognize the scale and urgency of at-home testing needed to contend with the highly contagious Omicron variant, which arrived suddenly and had already spread across the nation. Long lines for rapid tests formed across the country, as pharmacy and grocery shelves emptied of them.</p> <p>While some Americans received tests within days of the website going live in mid-January, many got them weeks after placing orders, a consequence of manufacturers scaling up and delivering the tests in real time after the federal government contracted for them over the winter, Dr. Inglesby said.</p> <p>“We’ve been procuring the 500 million tests as quickly as they’ve been able to be manufactured,” he said. “As soon as they arrive they’re going to be sent out the door.”</p> <p>The next tranche of tests should be available with a “pretty rapid turnaround,” Dr. Inglesby said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Baltics demand tougher stance from West
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/baltics-russia-ukraine-war-blinken.html
GIST	<p>VILNIUS, Lithuania — Demanding assurances that the Baltic States will not become Russia’s next battleground, Lithuania’s president firmly told America’s top diplomat on Monday that warnings to deter Moscow from further aggressions are “no longer enough.”</p> <p>Hours later, Latvia’s foreign minister dismally predicted that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine would shatter any belief that the region could ever let down its guard against President Vladimir V. Putin. “We have no illusions about Putin’s Russia anymore,” Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics said. “I don’t see any good reason to assume Russia might change its policy.”</p>

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken is likely to get a similar earful on Tuesday in Estonia as he tries to convince Baltic leaders, who are also part of NATO, that the United States is doing all it can to stop Russia's assault on Ukraine from spreading across Europe — while remaining careful not to set off a wider war.

In a region that borders Russia, and which all too well remembers the forced rule of the Soviet Union, the Baltics are warily watching the crisis in Ukraine as a bellwether for their own security. Ukrainian flags are hung from doorways and draped from balconies across the capitals of Lithuania and Latvia. Blue-and-yellow posters, lights and billboards broadcast the region's support for Ukraine. In Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, a commuter bus had replaced its digital route display on Monday with a message that read, simply, "Vilnius ♥ Ukraine."

In Riga, the Latvian capital, Mr. Blinken said it was "very moving" to see the outpouring of support for Ukraine in the Baltics, which he praised as a longtime "democratic wall" against authoritarian rule.

But Baltic leaders appear unsatisfied with the level of military support the United States is providing to help deter Russian advances, either to Ukraine directly or to its allies in Europe. Mr. Rinkevics also said international sanctions against Mr. Putin's allies could be toughened, and he called on European states to stop the oil and gas imports from Russia that have become Moscow's economic lifeline.

Russia provides 10 percent of the world's oil and more than a third of the European Union's natural gas. Western sanctions are largely engineered to allow companies in Europe to continue to buy Russian energy, and the White House has resisted more aggressive penalties for fear that they would drive up the price of gasoline and other energy costs for Americans.

Europe, Baltic leaders told Mr. Blinken, has entered a new chapter.

"Unfortunately, the worsening security situation through the Baltic region is of great concern for all of us and around the world," said President Gitanas Nauseda of Lithuania. "Russia's reckless aggression against Ukraine once again proves that it is a long-term threat to European security, the security of our alliance, no matter how the end of the war in Ukraine comes."

He added: "I must say that strengthening deterrence is no longer enough, and we need more defense here in place. Otherwise, it will be too late here, Mr. Secretary. Putin will not stop in Ukraine if he will not be stopped."

Mr. Blinken sought to reassure the officials that, as fellow members of NATO, the Baltic States would be robustly defended should Russia try to move in.

Citing the NATO collective defense pact that "an attack on one is an attack on all," Mr. Blinken said the United States and the rest of the military alliance "will defend every, every inch of NATO territory should it come under attack."

"There should be no doubt about that on anyone's mind," Mr. Blinken said.

It was a message he repeated throughout the day.

There are already thousands of American troops in the Baltics, the majority of which were sent in the face of Russia's recent aggressions, and Mr. Blinken noted that the Pentagon has sent F-35 fighter jets as it considers a more permanent presence of U.S. forces to the region.

At the same time, the United States and other NATO states have rushed more than 17,000 antitank weapons, including Javelin missiles, to Ukraine in an effort to help the besieged country defend itself from Russia's far more powerful military. Mr. Blinken said an estimated 70 percent of assistance provided by the United States is already in Ukraine's hands.

Though Ukraine's leaders have pleaded for NATO to establish a no-fly zone over its skies — a demand that the country's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, delivered to Mr. Blinken this past weekend at Ukraine's border with Poland — neither the United States nor the rest of the military alliance is willing to take that step, worried that it would escalate a conflict that has already created the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

Mr. Blinken also sidestepped a question on Monday as to whether Poland would provide its fighter planes to Ukraine after being equipped with American F-16 jets, although he said earlier this week that the deal was being considered.

Whether it can go through quickly enough to stanch the bloodshed in Ukraine, where Russian shelling has killed civilians and millions of people have been left homeless, is not yet clear.

What is more obvious is how heavily the casualties are weighing on the Baltics.

"We cannot afford for Ukrainian cities to become another Srebrenica, Grozny, or Aleppo," said Gabrielius Landsbergis, Lithuania's foreign minister.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Truckers demonstrate outside Washington
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/us/dc-truck-convoy-protest.html
GIST	<p>A convoy of truckers and other supporters circled the capital on the Beltway for a second day on Monday, protesting Covid-19 mandates and hoping to attract attention from lawmakers.</p> <p>Brian Brase, a convoy organizer, told participants gathered at a staging area in Hagerstown, Md., that the convoy would again avoid entering Washington, D.C. He stressed that the protesters did not want to spur a violent event like the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, which he said would discredit the group.</p> <p>And he said the group did not intend to tie up traffic.</p> <p>"We don't want to shut down the Beltway," Mr. Brase said. "We want them to hear us roar."</p> <p>A similar demonstration on Sunday had minimal impact on traffic. The convoy — consisting of several dozen trucks, along with minivans, motorcycles, pickup trucks and hatchbacks — looped twice around Interstate 495, known as the Capital Beltway, before returning to a staging area at the Hagerstown Speedway, where the group has been based for several days. By the second lap, the vehicles in the group had spread out along the highway, and the congestion took on the feel of an ordinary weekday commute.</p> <p>On Monday morning, there appeared to be far fewer passenger vehicles and RVs taking part than there were on Sunday, and the group planned to drive around the Beltway only once.</p> <p>Jennifer Anderson, 48, a CBD shop owner from Corpus Christi, Texas, said she joined the convoy to protest vaccine mandates preventing her from visiting her children and grandchildren in Canada. "It's been two years since I broke bread with my family," Ms. Anderson said, adding that she did not know when she would see them again.</p> <p>She said she refused to receive a Covid-19 vaccination because she believed it to be unsafe. (The Food and Drug Administration has fully approved vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna as safe and effective in adults.)</p> <p>The main group behind the caravan, the People's Convoy, has called for an end to the national emergency that was first declared by President Donald Trump in March 2020 and was recently extended by President Biden. The protesters also say they want meetings with lawmakers, congressional hearings into the pandemic's origin and an end to government vaccine and mask mandates. Many states have</p>

	<p>already scaled back restrictions as reports of new coronavirus cases and deaths have declined in recent weeks.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued new guidance in late February suggesting that the vast majority of Americans could stop wearing masks, and many medical experts say vaccine mandates are effective in persuading more people to get their shots, which they say helps prevent the spread of the virus.</p> <p>Christopher Rodriguez, director of the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, said on Sunday that the protest did not result in major disruptions to the city's transportation routes. He cautioned, though, that it was an "unpredictable" event. The city's request to extend the National Guard's presence has been approved through Wednesday, with 249 troops and 15 heavy vehicles on hand to respond to roadway disruptions.</p> <p>The People's Convoy was one of several groups inspired by the Canadian protests against pandemic restrictions that disrupted Ottawa, the capital, for weeks. Many in the American group appeared to be aligned with far-right organizations and activists. On Saturday, organizers with the People's Convoy shared a supportive post from a prominent QAnon account on its official Telegram channel.</p> <p>Mr. Brase said the group had plans to meet with two Republican senators, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas and Senator Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, on Tuesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 EPA tightens pollution rules on trucks, vans
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/climate/trucks-pollution-rules-epa.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Monday proposed strict new limits on pollution from buses, delivery vans, tractor-trailers and other heavy trucks — the first time in more than 20 years that tailpipe standards have been tightened for the biggest polluters on the road.</p> <p>The new draft rule from the Environmental Protection Agency would require heavy-duty trucks to reduce emissions of nitrogen dioxide by 90 percent by 2031. Nitrogen dioxide is linked to lung cancer, heart disease and premature death.</p> <p>The E.P.A. also announced plans to slightly tighten truck emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that is driving climate change. The new rules for nitrogen oxide pollution would apply to trucks beginning with the model year 2027, while the carbon dioxide rules would apply to trucks starting with the model year 2024.</p> <p>The truck pollution rule is the latest in a series of new pollution policies under President Biden, who is seeking to reduce the emissions that are dangerously warming the planet and rebuild environmental standards that had been weakened by President Donald J. Trump.</p> <p>Vice President Kamala Harris announced the proposal, along with a suite of other federal clean transportation actions, including the expenditure of \$5.5 billion to help states purchase low or zero-emission transit buses, and \$17 million to replace diesel school buses with electric versions in underserved communities.</p> <p>Late last year, the E.P.A. tightened standards on auto pollution and announced new rules governing methane, a climate-warming gas that leaks from oil and gas wells. This year, the agency is expected to roll out new restrictions on greenhouse gases and on industrial soot released by power plants.</p> <p>The administration is portraying the truck rule announced Monday as central to Mr. Biden's agenda of environmental justice, as many communities of color are located alongside highways and are subject to elevated levels of pollution.</p>

“Seventy-two million people are estimated to live near truck freight routes in America, and they are more likely to be people of color and those with lower incomes,” the E.P.A. administrator, Michael S. Regan, said. “These overburdened communities are directly exposed to pollution that causes respiratory and cardiovascular problems, among other serious and costly health effects. These new standards will drastically cut dangerous pollution by harnessing recent advancements in vehicle technologies from across the trucking industry as it advances toward a zero-emissions transportation future.”

Public health experts welcomed the move. “Cleaning up trucks is a critical step to achieving the president’s vision not only of environmental justice but also the cancer moonshot,” said Paul Billings, a senior vice president at the American Lung Association. “Diesel gas is a known carcinogen.”

The new limits would prevent up to 2,100 premature deaths, 6,700 hospital admissions and emergency department visits, 18,000 cases of asthma in children, 78,000 lost days of work and 1.1 million lost days of school by the year 2045, according to E.P. A. estimates.

The agency estimates that the economic benefits of the rule could be up to \$250 billion and said those benefits “would exceed its costs by billions of dollars.”

But truckers and manufacturers say the rule is too stringent and costly, and that compliance could send higher prices rippling through the economy.

“This new standard simply may not be technologically feasible,” said Jed Mandel, president of the Truck and Engine Manufacturers Association, an industry group. “We’re worried about the cost. There is a potential of adverse impacts on the economy and jobs. Nobody wants to see union jobs laid off. Regular lunch-pail, blue collar workers.”

Jay Grimes, director of federal affairs for the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, said new restrictions would be especially onerous for small truckers, which he said comprise 90 percent of the industry.

“We’ve seen since the start of the pandemic the efforts truckers are making on a daily basis to keep the supply chain stable,” Mr. Grimes said. “Higher prices on the small business side are going to get passed down to consumers in the supply chain.”

The federal government last updated its truck emissions rule in 2001, when the E.P.A. required commercial trucks to cut emissions of nitrogen dioxide by 95 percent over 10 years. That contributed to a 40 percent drop in national nitrogen dioxide emissions, the agency said. It estimates that the new rule will contribute to a 60 percent drop in emissions by 2045.

The E.P.A. called the new rule the first in a three-step “Clean Trucks Plan” — a series of clean air and climate change regulations over the next three years designed to reduce pollution from trucks and buses and to accelerate the transition to a future of all-electric, zero-pollution vehicles.

After a first year in which President Biden tried to push ambitious climate legislation through Congress, [only to see it stall](#), the administration is using its [regulatory machinery to try to curb pollution](#). The E.P.A. is working on new limits for auto pollution, due out next year, which it hopes will accelerate a transition to electric vehicles. Mr. Biden has pledged that half of all new cars sold in the United States by 2030 will be electric vehicles.

While the new truck regulations will cut pollution that harms human health, they won’t do much to reduce emissions that warm the planet, climate experts said.

The proposed regulations will require some trucks, 17 of the 33 categories of heavy-duty trucks, to lower their carbon dioxide emissions. That’s designed to bolster sales of all-electric trucks in the United States, from fewer than 1,000 in 2020 to about 1.5 percent of total truck sales, or roughly 10,000 trucks, in 2027.

But in order to put the United States on a path toward a transition to all-electric trucks, the forthcoming truck rules would have to be far more stringent, experts said. Transportation is the largest single source of greenhouse gases generated by the United States, representing [29 percent of the nation's total emissions](#).

"It's great to see that the rule is driving 90 percent reduction in air pollution in heavy-duty vehicles and at the same time opening the door to reducing greenhouse gas pollution," said Drew Kodjak, executive director of the International Council on Clean Transportation, a research organization. "But we've got this thing called climate change and we've really got to start driving electrification in the heavy-duty truck sector. My big concern is that the proposal as it is written will not do that."

Advocates for warehouse workers, many of whom are exposed to pollution from truck exhaust, said they would like regulations that replace diesel-fueled trucks with electric or zero-emissions vehicles.

"Cutting emissions anywhere is good," said Yana Kalmyka, an organizer with Warehouse Workers for Justice. "But if you're thinking about a community that has tens of thousands of trucks a day passing through it, electrification is the only just solution. The rule is not addressing other industrial truck pollutants such as soot, and we know that Black and brown communities are facing cumulative burdens from these pollutants."

"Warehouse workers are breathing in all this air — this is a workplace issue and an environmental racism issue," she added.

The E.P.A. has said it intends to create another set of greenhouse gas rules for trucks, beginning as soon as model year 2030, that will be "significantly stronger" than the current standards, and designed to speed the transition to all-electric trucks.

"Waiting for another few years to do the next set of greenhouse gas standards for trucks is wrong. We just don't have time," said Margo Oge, an expert on electric vehicles who headed the E.P.A.'s Office of Transportation and Air Quality from 1994 to 2012. "My hope is that they will use this time to strengthen the standard now."

The rule announced Monday will be open for public comment for 46 days, and the E.P.A. is expected to finalize it by the end of 2022.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Hate for Putin Russia consumes Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/ukraine-putin-hate.html
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine — Trapped in his apartment on the outskirts of Kyiv during fierce battles over the weekend, the well-known Ukrainian poet Oleksandr Irvanets composed a few lines that encapsulated the national mood.</p> <p>"I shout out to the whole world," he wrote in a short poem published online by his fans, who have since lost touch with the writer and were worried that he may have fallen behind Russian lines. "I won't forgive anyone!"</p> <p>If there is one overriding emotion gripping Ukraine right now, it is hate.</p> <p>It is a deep, seething bitterness for President Vladimir V. Putin, his military and his government. But Ukrainians are not giving a pass to ordinary Russians, either, calling them complicit through years of political passivity. The hatred is vented by mothers in bomb shelters, by volunteers preparing to fight on the front lines, by intellectuals and by artists.</p> <p>The emotion is so powerful it could not be assuaged even by an Orthodox religious holiday on Sunday intended to foster forgiveness before Lent. Called Forgiveness Sunday, the holiday is recognized in both the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches.</p>

And this hatred has overwhelmed the close personal ties between two Slavic nations, where [many people have family living in both countries](#).

Billboards have gone up along roadsides in gigantic block letters, telling Russians in profanity-laced language to get out. Social media posts in spaces often shared by Russians and Ukrainians have been awash in furious comments.

Some Ukrainians have posted pictures of [people killed in the military assault](#) in Russian chat rooms on the Telegram app. They have vented by writing on the reviews pages for websites of Moscow restaurants.

And they have been mocking Russians in scathing terms for complaining about hardships with banking transactions or the collapsing ruble currency because of international sanctions.

[“Damn, what’s wrong with Apple Pay?”](#) Stanislav Bobrytsky, a Ukrainian computer programmer also trapped in the fighting around the capital, Kyiv, wrote sarcastically about how Russians are responding to the war. “I cannot pay for a latte in my favorite coffee shop.”

Mr. Putin is the target of much of the Ukrainians’ unbridled resentment.

The authoritarian leader is to blame, almost all Ukrainians agree. But the frustration is also directed more broadly at Russian society.

Many Ukrainians chastise Russians for increasingly accepting middle-class comforts afforded by [the country’s oil wealth](#) in exchange for declining to resist limits on their freedoms. They blame millions of Russians, who Ukrainians say gave up on the post-Soviet dreams of freedom and openness to the West, for enabling the war.

“Are your iPhones all right?” another Ukrainian writer, Andriy Bondar, asked Russians on his Facebook page, after a thinly attended antiwar rally in Moscow that was broken up by the riot police. “We are very worried about you. It’s so cruel they use rubber sticks, those terrible riot police.”

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine also appealed to Russians on Sunday to protest for their own sakes as much as for the Ukrainians.

“Don’t miss this opportunity,” he said in comments directed at Russians.

“Citizens of Russia, for you this is a struggle not only for peace in Ukraine, it is a struggle for your country, for the best that was in it, for the freedom that you saw, for the prosperity that you felt,” he added. “If you keep silent now, then only your poverty will speak for you later, and only repression will answer. Do not be silent!”

Mr. Zelensky did not hold back on how he felt about the Russian military.

“We will not forgive the shooting of unarmed people,” he said.

There were virtually no antiwar protests in Russia before the conflict began, though small demonstrations have been staged in recent days. Most participants were arrested.

Yuri Makarov, the chief editor of the Ukrainian national broadcasting company and the head of a national literature and arts award committee, said the war had driven a deep wedge between the Ukrainian and Russian societies that will be hard to heal. Russians, he said, have become Ukrainians’ “collective enemies.”

Some modicum of popular support is enabling the fighting, he said.

	<p>“The orders to shell the residential areas of Mariupol, Kharkiv and Zhytomyr were given by specific colonels, captains and junior lieutenants, not by Putin or Shoigu,” he said, referring to the Russian president and his minister of defense, Sergei K. Shoigu. “It is their choice and their responsibility,” he added.</p> <p>“As for the Russians, I am not interested in their motivation now. They, with the exception of a few, were quite comfortable being in a full dictatorship,” he added.</p> <p>Olha Koba, a psychologist in Kyiv, said that “anger and hate in this situation is a normal reaction and important to validate.” But it is important to channel it into something useful, she said, such as making incendiary bombs out of empty bottles.</p> <p>“When people are happy about the death of Russian soldiers, it is explicable,” she said. “There is a subconscious understanding that this soldier will no longer be able to kill their loved ones.”</p> <p>Mr. Irvanets, the poet who sent his bitter composition to friends over the weekend, wrote that he had composed the lines in “a city shattered by missiles,” and he referenced the upcoming holiday on Sunday.</p> <p>But by Forgiveness Sunday, his fans were writing on social media that he had not been in contact and they were concerned that something had happened to him.</p> <p>“I will never forgive Russia,” the poet wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Fighting in Ukraine over big cities
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/article/ukraine-cities.html
GIST	<p>Blackened and bombed-out apartment towers. Families huddled together in subway stations. Downtown streets made silent, with shuttered cafes and nightclubs.</p> <p>The images emerging from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine are reminders of what wars often prove: cities are both key strategic targets and the places that bear the greatest costs of conflict.</p> <p>Towns and villages in the path of the Russian advance have also been devastated. But it is the cities, which were home to about two-thirds of Ukraine’s population of 44 million people before the invasion, that are the focus of the Russian assault.</p> <p>Now from Kharkiv and Kyiv in the north to Mariupol in the south, many women and children have fled, and urban neighborhoods are becoming battlegrounds. Businesses, homes, schools, cultural institutions and historical buildings are all being threatened with destruction. At the same time, Ukrainian fighters have mounted a stiffer-than-expected opposition to a superior force in the early days of the war.</p> <p>Here are the major cities in Ukraine that are under attack — and what they stand to lose. Updates on the status of Russia’s incursion will be added regularly.</p> <p>Kharkiv: Undergoing fierce fighting</p> <p>Roughly 20 miles from the northwest border between Ukraine and Russia sits Kharkiv, a city whose place in the Kremlin’s version of history made it an early target of Russian attacks.</p> <p>Russian bombs have devastated the city’s downtown core, including Kharkiv National University. On March 4, the city was still under Ukrainian control, despite the bombardment.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has long maintained that Kharkiv’s history provides proof that Ukraine is an appendage of Russia. During and after World War I, the city served as the first capital of the</p>

Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, a largely Moscow-controlled entity set up in opposition to the Ukrainian People's Republic in Kyiv, which declared an independent Ukrainian state.

With 1.4 million residents, Kharkiv is Ukraine's [second largest city](#) and a transportation hub — a key stop on a major rail corridor, with highways connecting western Ukraine and Russia's highway system.

Kharkiv is home to one of the first contemporary art galleries in the country, which opened its doors in 1996, and features other culturally significant venues.

It is famous for the poets and writers of the Kharkiv Romantic School, including Taras Shevchenko, memorialized in a city garden monument, one of many sculptures and landmarks to cultural figures.

Kherson: Fell to the Russian military

The port city of Kherson is in the south of Ukraine, on the Dnieper River near the Black Sea. It sits about 340 miles from the capital of Kyiv.

The city is a major hub for shipbuilding and provides access to Ukraine's southern coastline for invading Russian forces.

Kherson was a training ground for naval cadets, and is home to major technical colleges supporting local industries, including agriculture, cotton textiles and engineering.

The city has also been a backdrop for [important archaeological excavations](#), unearthing evidence of ancient settlements through the discoveries of burial mounds, royal tombs and other artifacts from the third and fourth century.

Now, the [city is unrecognizable](#), said its mayor, Igor Kolykhaev. Days of intense fighting left as many as 300 Ukrainian civilians and fighters dead, he said. Power, water and gas services were damaged during the heavy shelling of the city of about 300,000 people.

The fall of the city put the Russian military in view of western Ukraine, toward the city of Odessa. For a few hours on March 5, protesters gathered in Liberty Square in the city center, the most visible example so far of [resistance to Russian occupation](#).

Kyiv: Russians closing in, meeting strong resistance

Just a few months ago, Kyiv was a well-kept secret among [pandemic partygoers](#), the scene of a vibrant underground nightlife and a popular draw among tourists breezing through Eastern Europe's metropolises. Now, the Ukrainian capital is under siege.

A city of 2.8 million before the war, Kyiv is the political, cultural and industrial center of the country. The city has several important historical and architectural monuments including the [cathedral of St. Sophia](#), which is now a museum. Built in the 11th century, it is considered one of the world's finest examples of early Rus'-Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture.

Kyiv is the most important territorial target for Russia and is being encircled by Russian troops. A 40-mile long column of [Russian armored and military vehicles](#) has been lined up to the northwest of the city. From there, Russian troops are firing rockets into the city.

On March 1, Kyiv's main radio and TV tower was [hit by a projectile](#). There were other explosions nearby, killing at least five people. As of March 4, most of the fighting was still taking place in towns outside the city.

Electricity and communications continue to work, for the most part, along with train lines, but schools and most businesses have closed.

[Tens of thousands of people](#) have fled Kyiv, heading west to Lviv and then on to Poland or other destinations in Europe, even as refugees from areas with pitched battles to the west have more recently started to pour in.

Mariupol: Under heavy shelling

Mariupol sits along the world's shallowest sea, the Azov. Before the war, its coastline provided a backdrop for tourists — and for earlier tensions between Ukraine and Russia.

It is between the Donbas region, controlled by Russian-backed separatists, and the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014. Since it is also less than 40 miles from the Russian border, Mariupol has been hit hard and early, suffering more than many other Ukrainian cities in the first phase of Russia's invasion.

Heavy [Russian bombardment](#) has cut off power, water and heat. Russia and Ukraine agreed to a limited "cease-fire" on Saturday morning only to see it [collapse within hours under Russian shelling](#).

If Russia seizes the area, Ukraine will lose key industrial infrastructure and [Russia will gain a clear path](#) for President Putin to take control of the Sea of Azov, a thruway for Ukraine's agricultural products and other exports such as coal and steel.

In 1948, when the Soviet Union governed Ukraine, the city was renamed for [Andrey Aleksandrovich Zhdanov](#), a high-ranking [Communist Party](#) functionary who had been born there. The city's earlier name, Mariupol, was restored in 1989 as Soviet rule faded near the end of the Cold War.

Now many of the city's buildings bear the burn marks of Russian artillery.

Mykolaiv: Ukrainian forces battle to keep control

Mykolaiv's strategic location on an inlet of the Black Sea has made it a key battleground in Russia's effort to capture Ukraine's southern coast and cut off the country's access to the sea. After seizing the nearby city of Kherson, Russia has turned its forces to Mykolaiv, one of the last obstacles to Russia's westward push and to Odessa, a major economic and cultural center.

Founded under the Russian Empire in the late 18th century as a shipyard, Mykolaiv was home to Russia's Black Sea fleet for decades and served as military-industrial complex for the empire. Following the end of World War II, the city prospered as one of the main shipbuilding centers of the Soviet Union and later became a key port for Ukraine's military fleet.

For several days, Mykolaiv has been the scene of a fierce battle between Ukrainian and Russian forces. Ukrainian troops have been [defending the city along several fronts](#), facing down punishing artillery barrages, helicopter attacks and rocket strikes.

By Sunday, they had driven Russian forces back from the city limits and retaken the airport. But [the assault resumed on Monday with a ferocious artillery attack](#) that hit civilian neighborhoods with rockers. Until just a few days ago, the city's roughly 500,000 residents could still enjoy the picturesque nature surrounding Mykolaiv, including granite mountains, clear lakes and canyons. But now, most residents appear to have fled.

To reach Odessa by the easiest route, Russian forces will have to push through Mykolaiv and across a key drawbridge which is still under the control of Ukrainian troops.

If the troops fail to stop the Russian advance, the mayor of Mykolaiv, [Oleksandr Senkevich, said they are under orders to blow the bridge up](#).

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HEADLINE	03/07 Ukraine president in Kyiv office
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/zelensky-ukraine-russia-invasion.html

GIST	<p>President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine spoke from his office in Kyiv on Monday night, the first time he had been seen there since the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24.</p> <p>In a brief video posted on his Facebook page, Mr. Zelensky said that he was not hiding, and he was not afraid of anyone.</p> <p>“We used to say: Monday is a hard day,” he said. “There is a war in the country so every day is Monday, and now we are used to the fact that every day and every night are like that.”</p> <p>In the video, Mr. Zelensky provided updates on Russian attacks, and also said he had signed a decree on Monday to present state awards to 96 “Ukrainian heroes.”</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky also criticized Russian troops for attacks on certain sites on Monday, including accusing them of firing at a bread factory in Makariv, about an hour west of Kyiv.</p> <p>“Think about it — to fire at the bread factory. Who should you be to do that?” Mr. Zelensky said.</p> <p>The president also condemned Russian troops for disregarding an agreement on a humanitarian corridor, after shelling prevented evacuation of besieged cities.</p> <p>“Did it work?” Mr. Zelensky said of the corridor. “Russian tanks worked instead.”</p> <p>In an update on Monday night, Britain’s defense ministry said that Russian troops continued to directly target evacuation corridors, which had resulted in several casualties of civilians who tried to flee Irpin, just outside Kyiv. It said the town had been without heat, water or power for several days because of fighting in the area.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky’s nightly video addresses, rallying Ukrainian resistance and world opinion, have become something of a ritual since Russia invaded on Feb. 24. Russian offensives against several major cities have bogged down in the face of logistical problems and unexpectedly fierce defenses.</p> <p>In his Monday night message, Mr. Zelensky said that a national movement had unfolded in the southern part of the country, creating “a nightmare” for Russia.</p> <p>“We are not afraid of tanks and machine guns,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky said that every day of resistance puts Ukraine in a “strong position” to guarantee the country’s future, adding that Ukraine will rebuild everything that has been shelled and bombed by Russian forces.</p> <p>“There will be no trace of the enemy,” he said. “We will make our cities destroyed by the invader better than any city in Russia.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Project delays; concrete strike in 4th month
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/project-delays-mount-as-concrete-strike-enters-fourth-month
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — There appears to be no end in sight to a job strike in King County over concrete, an action that has pushed back completion dates on major transportation projects in the region.</p> <p>The West Seattle Bridge is one of several projects, along with light rail and new housing developments that have been impacted by the strike, which is now entering its fourth month.</p> <p>The job action could end up costing taxpayers in both time and money.</p>

West Seattle Bridge repairs can't be completed while the concrete strike drags on even as the Seattle Department of Transportation continues to complete prep work but getting concrete is critical to the next phase.

"I think it's terrible," said Tony Delegates, who lives in West Seattle. "It's causing a lot of construction around town to stop."

Sound Transit projects are also being delayed with four expansion projects affected along with 400 workers who have been laid off or will be soon.

The union representing the striking drivers calls it heartbreaking.

"No one expected us to be out this long," said Jamie Fleming with Teamsters Local 174. "Everyone is hurting but we have too much invested in this to give up now."

The Teamsters also said they are starting to see non-union replacement drivers being used.

"There have been major safety and legality issues with the way they are trying to run this," Fleming said of the concrete companies.

Aside from critical transportation projects, new housing construction is also being held up.

"There is a new two-family dwelling behind where we live and they haven't been able to pour the concrete, the foundation, and it's been a month now," said Erik Usher.

The concrete companies involved in contract negotiations released a statement about the stalled talks:

Since July 2021, the four concrete companies (Cadman, Glacier, Stoneway, Salmon Bay) have consistently bargained in good faith and in a professional manner. The parties met on February 24, 2022, with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services (FMCS) for 12 hours and the companies' proposed improvements to our previous offer with the goal of finding a resolution. The Teamsters now claim the companies have a collective goal of "union busting" and "destabilizing the construction industry." These claims are completely unfounded and irrational. The companies' last proposed offer to the union exceeds an 18% increase in wages over the three-year contract term. The Teamsters initiated this strike and continue to prolong it, apparently without regard to the impacts to its own members and the Region. The union's actions have caused the lapse of healthcare for its members and layoffs throughout the industry and continue to hold the community hostage to meet their demands. They have shown no boundaries and, instead, create conspiracy theories and lies to portray the companies as solely responsible for the dispute. The companies have consistently explained our position to the union throughout negotiations. The disagreements with the union's demands are not a failure to bargain in good faith or an unfair labor practice. We believe this is an attempt by the Teamsters to bully the construction industry and the Region. The companies have received correspondence from politicians, government agencies and other stakeholders suggesting the companies end the strike. The companies are not on strike. The companies have not locked out our employees. It is time for that correspondence to be sent to Rick Hicks and the Teamsters 174, where it belongs. The Teamsters can end this strike today and return to work. The companies remain legally obligated to continue bargaining with the union for a new agreement. Furthermore, the union can choose to allow its members the opportunity to vote the last offer presented by the companies. Respectfully, Cadman, Stoneway Concrete, Glacier Northwest, and Salmon Bay Sand & Gravel

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HEADLINE	03/07 WA name changes 18 geographical features
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-state-to-change-names-to-18-geographical-features-to-get-rid-of-derogatory-word
GIST	OLYMPIA, Wash. - There are 18 geographic features across Washington state possibly being renamed.

	<p>The United States Department of the Interior (DoI) is ordering changing the names of the mountains, rivers, creeks, islands and lakes with derogatory names.</p> <p>The DoI declared the word, s---, derogatory to tribal women last year.</p> <p>The interior did propose multiple new names.</p>
Return to Top	<p><i>Click on link to view the 18 geographical features for possible name changes and proposed new names:</i></p> <p>https://www.scribd.com/document/563221049/Federal-Name-Changes#from_embed</p>

HEADLINE	03/07 Tacoma to clear sprawling homeless camp
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/newsletters-deprecated/tacoma-set-to-clear-sprawling-homeless-encampment-this-morning
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — A growing homeless encampment in Tacoma has been put on notice that the city plans to clear the campers out Tuesday morning.</p> <p>The cleanup, slated to being at 9 a.m., is part of the city’s efforts to clear encampments and get campers off the streets and into shelter.</p> <p>Neighbors said the amount of garbage and human waste have grown along S. 2nd Street and Tacoma Avenue.</p> <p>“Something needs to happen. I mean help them out,” said Keenan Peterson at Tim’s Handy Mart. “It’s becoming ridiculous.”</p> <p>The residents and businesses said issues from the campers include trash, human waste and safety concerns, and it was time to help the unsheltered who are living along Tacoma Avenue.</p> <p>The city posted notices a week ago that its crews would clear the camp Tuesday.</p> <p>Peterson says the neighborhood has been declining for some time.</p> <p>“They just don’t seem to care anymore,” Peterson said. “Just this past month there’s been two car fires (and) somebody tried to catch the store on fire while the manager was working.”</p> <p>The city said HEAL Team outreach workers have been working to help get campers into shelter but six people are still staying in tents and turned down services. The city it will continue to conduct outreach services for the remaining six campers.</p> <p>Tacoma has been working to clear massive encampments like the one under Interstate 705 since doubling its shelter bed capacity.</p> <p>“It’s rough out here for a lot of people,” said Tony Womack, who is homeless and lives not too far from the camp being cleared. “I’ve seen a lot of my friends that died.”</p> <p>Womack says living on the streets is a constant challenge to find permanent housing.</p> <p>“Where are they going to go?” said Womack. “Having to move all the time and not knowing if you’re going to get a good night’s sleep. That’s the problem.”</p> <p>Neighbors say city leaders need to work on finding more long-term solutions instead of shuffling the problem from area to area.</p>

	"They kick them out and they just find somewhere else to go," Peterson said. "Nine times out of 10, they'll just go back to where they came from."
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HEADLINE	03/07 Oregon readies to lift state mask mandate
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/masks-go-away-for-good-in-oregon-this-week-but-some-covid-era-changes-may-remain
GIST	<p>EUGENE, Ore. (KVAL) – The countdown to Oregon unmasking is on with the statewide mask mandate lifting on Friday and the emergency declaration soon to follow.</p> <p>But it won't be a return to pre-pandemic life; some COVID-era changes are here to stay.</p> <p>"We do have some glass partitions in some of our booths over in the bar that will stay up," says Jessica Blaine with the Marche Restaurant Group.</p> <p>As the mask mandate is lifted, businesses may still choose to require them. Marche, for one, won't be doing so.</p> <p>"We're thrilled and excited to be able to see the faces of our customers," Blaine said.</p> <p>But the restaurant will keep in place other protective measures, like sanitizing high touch surfaces, requiring vaccines for staff and increasing ventilation.</p> <p>"We've also learned a lot about making sure that our air space is really cleaned," Blaine said. "We've updated lots of our HVAC systems in the restaurants, so that's not going away ever."</p> <p>As Oregonians take off their masks, the state will soon shed its COVID-19 emergency declaration. Washington state will also be ending its mask mandate this week.</p> <p>On April 1, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown will lift the declaration which, among other things, made volunteers available to local governments and provided federal reimbursement for disaster relief.</p> <p>So does this mean there will be an end to some of those state-funded resources, like pop-up testing centers?</p> <p>"I think that we will see some operational changes," said Steve Adams, Lane County's COVID-19 Incident Commander. "Specifically what that is, I don't know."</p> <p>Adams says for now, all county testing and vaccination resources are set to continue, although it's unclear what will happen after April 1.</p> <p>There is hope that the Federal COVID Emergency Declaration will still allow for reimbursement to the state as Oregon takes steps toward normal life.</p> <p>"It's springtime and new beginnings and new starts, so that's exciting to think about for sure," said Blaine.</p> <p>But we're not leaving the pandemic behind just yet.</p> <p>"Don't fold up the tent until you really and truly know you're not going to need it," says Adams.</p> <p>Adams says Public Health will continue to scale their offerings based on demand.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Spokane gas prices nearing record highs
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SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/traffic/gas-prices/spokane-gas-prices-up-46-cents-one-week/293-0afcc4c6-3875-419a-a2d0-b69437e17392
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — As the price of oil jumped to its highest across the U.S. for the first time since 2008, Washingtonians are seeing an increase in gas prices. According to a GasBuddy study, gasoline prices in Spokane have risen 46 cents per gallon in the last week.</p> <p>In the same short time frame, the average price for regular gas has also increased by 46.5 cents across the United States. On Sunday, the price of regular gas broke \$4 per gallon on average across the U.S. On the same day in Spokane, the cheapest price for regular gas was \$3.73 per gallon while the most expensive was \$4.25.</p> <p>“There are few words to describe the unprecedented rise in gasoline prices over the last week, with massive spikes coast to coast in both gasoline and diesel prices, as oil prices jump to their highest since 2008,” Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy said in a statement. “Forget the \$4 per gallon mark, the nation will soon set new all-time record highs and we could push closer to a national average of \$4.50/gal.”</p> <p>Gas prices in Spokane have increased 49.1 cents per gallon over the last month and are \$1.22 higher compared to this time last year. In California, gas prices could be heading for \$5.50 per gallon with more stations charging \$6 and beyond.</p> <p>Across the state, the regular gas price increased by 44.3 cents, according to GasBuddy. As of Monday, March 7, the average price across Washington is \$4.42, compared to last's week \$3.98.</p> <p>Current gas prices in neighboring areas: Idaho: \$3.97 per gallon, up 45.8 cents per gallon from last week's \$3.50. Yakima: \$4.34 per gallon, up 47.4 cents compared to last week's \$3.86.</p> <p>"As we lose a major global producer under the weight of deserving bipartisan sanctions for invading a sovereign country, the cost is high," De Haan said in a statement. "Americans will be feeling the pain of the rise in prices for quite some time, with little good news foreseen."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Daylight saving time March 13—get ready
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/daylight-saving-time-2022-how-to-prepare-your-body-for-the-time-change
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES - Daylight saving time (DST) — that one-hour clock adjustment observed by most of the United States — occurs on March 13, 2022, and this can leave many Americans, well, tired.</p> <p>Each year, it forces weary clock owners to shift their devices an hour ahead, usually before bed Saturday night, to ensure being on time for Sunday morning activities.</p> <p>What is daylight saving time? The "Spring Forward" clock shift occurs each year at 2 a.m. on the second Sunday in March — or March 13 in 2022. "Falling Back" occurs on the first Sunday in November.</p> <p>The new shift means the dawn's early light will break through later than it has during the months of standard time and the twilight's last gleaming will extend deeper into the evening.</p> <p>While the one-hour shift in time may seem minute, it can still cause sleep disruptions for some people and lead to a reduced quantity and quality of sleep.</p> <p>In 2019, more than 2,000 adults in the U.S. were asked how tired they felt after daylight saving time was initiated, and 55% of respondents said they felt extremely or somewhat tired.</p>

How did daylight saving time start?

According to the [U.S. Department of Commerce](#), DST started in the U.S. in 1918 as a way to create more sunlit hours when the weather is the warmest.

History of daylight saving time

Daylight saving time, or DST, was formally introduced in the U.S. in 1918 during World War I.

During the long days of summer, the sun rose in some northern regions between 4 and 5 a.m., when most non-farmers were asleep. Sunset happened before 8 p.m. and people turned on lights. By moving the clocks ahead an hour, backers believed the country could divert a bit of coal-fired electricity to the military instead of using it for an hour of home power. It was again adopted in World War II.

After each war, Congress rescinded the national laws, but many people liked the extra hour of sunshine at the end of summer days, so some states and even cities observed daylight saving time while others kept standard time year-round.

By 1966, airlines and other clock-watching businesses became tired of such quirks and pushed Congress to pass the Uniform Time Act. It codified daylight saving time, although it has been periodically modified, particularly the start and end dates.

Ultimately, the goal of DST has been to conserve energy with more daylight during the hours when most people are active, although some studies have found little energy savings.

Daylight saving time could pose health risks, studies show

Studies have shown that there may be a health benefit to [getting rid of daylight saving time](#) altogether.

According to the [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#), people may benefit from eliminating the time change, according to a [position statement published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine last summer](#).

The AASM contended that a switch to permanent standard time would put a stop to what they called dangerous impacts that have been correlated to daylight saving time.

"The position statement also cites evidence of increased risks of motor vehicle accidents, cardiovascular events, and mood disturbances following the annual 'spring forward' to daylight saving time," the statement said.

The statement also included studies that showed evidence of increased traffic fatalities, as much as 6%, within the first few days following the change to daylight saving time.

"There is ample evidence of the negative, short-term consequences of the annual change to daylight saving time in the spring," said AASM President Dr. Kannan Ramar. "Because the adoption of permanent standard time would be beneficial for public health and safety, the AASM will be advocating at the federal level for this legislative change."

Other highlighted short-term negative impacts that daylight saving time can have on human health include a range of ailments, like an increased risk of stroke, increased production of inflammatory markers, stress and overall loss of sleep.

According to another study, losing one hour of sleep raised the risk of having a heart attack the following Monday by 25%, compared to other Mondays during the year.

Dr. Amneet Sandhu studied 42,000 hospital admissions and found that an average of 32 patients had heart attacks on any given Monday. But on the Monday after moving the clock forward, there was an average of eight additional heart attacks.

How to deal with time change

This means the switch to daylight saving time shouldn't be taken lightly. Developing a plan to cope with the time change can reduce its impact on your sleep and overall wellness.

[The Sleep Foundation](#) has several tips for preparing your body for the sudden change:

- Gradually adjust your schedule: You can get ready to "spring forward" in March by gradually shifting your schedule in the week leading up to the time change. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine advises trying to [slowly adjust your schedule](#) by going to bed around 15-20 minutes earlier each day.
- Sleep well beforehand: Obtaining quality sleep in the nights leading up to the time change is important, as well. If you enter the daylight saving weekend already sleep-deprived, it's more likely you'll have negative effects in response to the time change, according to the Sleep Foundation.
- Consider relaxation techniques: Relaxation methods, including basic deep breathing and mindfulness meditation, can bring calm to your mind and body and make it easier to smoothly transition into sleep.
- Set your clocks before bed: Although the time change doesn't officially occur until 2 a.m., set your watch and household clocks to the new time before you go to bed. This may help lower your stress and avoid any timing mishaps on Sunday.
- Prioritize daylight exposure: Finding time for daylight exposure on the days following the change can help your body's internal clock acclimate to the new time. For example, make a plan to go outside, ideally in the morning, and receive [sun exposure](#) on the Sunday after the time change. If you live in a cold climate that makes being outside difficult, open your curtains and sit near a window to take in a meaningful dose of natural light.
- Take extra precautions: Try not to overload your schedule on the Sunday or Monday after the time shift in case you end up experiencing daytime sleepiness. If possible, schedule important meetings or events for later in the week when you've had more time to adjust. It's also best to avoid long drives right after the time change because of the potential dangers of drowsy driving.
- Eat a healthy diet: Although no single diet has been proven to be the best for sleep, balanced diets made up of lots of fruits and vegetables tend to provide the nutrients the body needs and have been [associated with better sleep](#). Other ways to prevent food-related sleep disruptions include eating dinner at least a few hours before going to bed, limiting consumption of heavy and spicy foods in the evening and being mindful of caffeine in beverages.
- Take a nap if necessary: If you find yourself tired in the days after switching to daylight saving time, a short nap may prove beneficial. Keeping a nap under 30 minutes can boost your alertness while reducing grogginess after waking up.

Which states do not observe daylight saving time?

DST is not observed in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the state of Arizona (with the exception of the Navajo Indian Reservation).

Other countries observe this time change as well, though many mistakenly think of it as uniquely American.

[TimeandDate.com](#) reported that there are different countries around the world that observe DST. Among them are Albania, Greece, Fiji, Egypt, Denmark, and Bulgaria.

Will US get rid of daylight saving time?

Last year, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio [renewed his call for the entire nation to save daylight all year round](#). It would have made daylight saving time permanent across the country. Several other states have voiced their support or opposition to daylight saving time. But any change can't take effect unless Congress changes federal law.

At least seven state legislatures have backed asking Congress to allow year-round daylight saving time in the past few years — and about [60% of California voters supported a ballot proposition in 2018 calling for such a move](#).

	<p>A 2019 survey from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed 4 in 10 Americans would like to see their clocks stay on standard time year-round, while about 3 in 10 prefer to stay on daylight saving time. About another 3 in 10 prefer what is the status quo in most of the United States, switching back and forth between daylight saving time in the summer and standard time in the winter.</p> <p>The AASM conducted a survey in July of 2,007 adults in the U.S., asking if they would support the elimination of daylight saving time.</p> <p>According to the survey, 63% supported eliminating seasonal time changes and were in favor of a national, fixed, year-round time.</p> <p>Additionally, a poll conducted by the Associated Press in 2019 found that 7 in 10 Americans prefer not to switch back and forth to mark daylight saving time.</p> <p>According to the poll, 4 in 10 Americans would like to see their clocks stay on standard time year-round, while about 3 in 10 prefer to stay on daylight saving time. About another 3 in 10 prefer what is the status quo in most of the U.S., switching back and forth between daylight saving time in the summer and standard time in the winter.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Russia oil ban? Gas prices surge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/us/politics/biden-russia-oil-ban.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden came under pressure on Monday to ban Russian oil imports into the United States, forcing the administration to consider action that could further punish President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia but exacerbate high gas prices that are hurting consumers at home.</p> <p>On Monday, a bipartisan group of American lawmakers agreed to move ahead with legislation that would ban Russian energy imports in the United States and suspend normal trade relations with Russia and Belarus. Some European countries, which are highly dependent on Russian energy, have expressed a willingness to reduce their reliance on those imports.</p> <p>Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said that “no decision has been made at this point by the president about a ban on importing oil from Russia,” adding that discussions were “ongoing internally” and with European allies.</p> <p>“I would note what the president is most focused on is ensuring we are continuing to take steps to deliver punishing economic consequences while taking all actions necessary to limit the impact of prices at the gas pump,” she said.</p> <p>Global stocks slid on Monday amid worries of an oil ban and escalating Russian attacks on Ukraine. It was Wall Street’s worst day in more than a year.</p> <p>The S&P 500 fell 3 percent, its sharpest daily decline since October 2020. The Nasdaq composite dropped 3.6 percent and is now 20 percent off its November record, entering territory known on Wall Street as a bear market, denoting a serious downturn.</p> <p>The Biden administration, along with its global allies, has already imposed sweeping financial, trade and technology sanctions on Russia, but Western countries have deliberately carved out its energy sector, with top U.S. officials saying it would be unwise to disrupt global supplies given how heavily Europe relies on Russian oil and gas. Some officials also view the move as potentially enriching Mr. Putin by driving up gas prices. The average price in the United States reached a national average of \$4.07 per gallon on Monday, up more than 10 percent from a week ago.</p>

At his State of the Union speech last week, Mr. Biden talked about the economy's strength but noted that high gas prices, along with rapid inflation, [are hurting consumers](#). Those dynamics pose a political problem for the president, whose approval rating has suffered amid voter concerns about his handling of the economy.

Mr. Biden spoke with the leaders of Britain, France and Germany by video on Monday, and the four "affirmed their determination to continue raising the costs on Russia for its unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine," according to a [White House statement](#).

But that cross-border cooperation could stop with oil. Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany said his country could not simply turn off the spigot.

"Europe has deliberately exempted energy supplies from Russia from sanctions," he said in a statement on Monday. "At the moment, Europe's supply of energy for heat generation, mobility, power supply and industry cannot be secured in any other way."

Biden administration officials say the immediate discussions over Russian energy are focused on banning domestic oil imports rather than carrying out wider sanctions that would cut off purchases by other countries. That could lessen the economic shock to oil markets given the United States does not import much Russian crude.

Last fall, it imported about 700,000 barrels per day from Russia, less than 10 percent of its total oil imports, U.S. officials said. By contrast, Europe imported 4.5 million barrels per day from Russia, about one-third of its total imports. The United States can easily find a way to make up for any loss of Russian oil, while Europe would have a harder time doing so, analysts said.

But any disruption in the flow of oil could further rattle global markets, including oil prices, which have surged because of the uncertainty over Mr. Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Brent crude, the global benchmark, ended Monday up about 4.3 percent to \$123.21 a barrel, but earlier it had climbed as high as \$139 a barrel. The price of oil has soared about 26 percent over the past week as the conflict has intensified.

In a sign of how concerned the administration is about the uncertainties around global energy flow, American officials have been discussing the possibility of increasing supply or distribution with oil-producing nations, including Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, which is a partner of Russia and has been subject to broad U.S. sanctions for years.

President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela said on Monday at a meeting with his council of vice presidents and military command that Venezuela had the capacity to produce more than three million barrels of crude oil per day "if necessary for the stability of the world."

Mr. Biden, in a speech more than one week before Mr. Putin's invasion of Ukraine, said that a conflict involving Russia could affect American consumers. "I will not pretend this will be painless," he said on Feb. 15. "There could be impact on our energy prices, so we are taking active steps to alleviate the pressure on our own energy markets and offset rising prices."

It is unclear how much pain an import ban would actually inflict on Russia. Moscow could try to make up for import bans by arranging to sell more oil to other customers, including China.

China is Russia's most powerful strategic partner, and it has supported Moscow's grievances against the United States and NATO during the war in Ukraine. On Monday, the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, said at a news conference in Beijing that "no matter how perilous the international landscape, we will maintain our strategic focus and promote the development of a comprehensive China-Russia partnership in the new era."

Yet China would have leverage to bargain down the purchase price, so Russia might still face a shortfall in revenue.

Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the impact of any import bans or energy sanctions on Russia — and perhaps on Mr. Putin’s policies — “depends on how broad it is.” He added that a wide cutoff of sales “will have a significant impact because that will diminish Russia’s hard currency earnings.”

“It’ll be reflected not only in the cash flow of the state budget, but also in the exchange rate.” Mr. Gabuev said. “You won’t have the hard cash to support the ruble.”

If the United States eventually imposes sanctions that keep Russia from selling its oil, Washington would need to ensure there is a robust global supply of oil. Some analysts ask whether the Biden administration would lift energy sanctions on Iran if the United States, Iran and other nations reached agreement on a new deal to restrict Tehran’s nuclear program. But U.S. officials say there would be no lifting of the sanctions.

“The economic impact depends on how much oil is being taken off the market and on what terms,” said Rachel Ziemba, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Economists have been trying to assess the implications. Goldman Sachs analysts estimate that if oil prices reach \$150 per barrel, it would shave off half of a percentage point from economic growth in the United States this year, as higher gas prices eat into consumer spending. They warn that the prospect of more inflation when prices are already rising at the fastest pace in 40 years could increase the odds that workers will demand higher wages, [leading to a so-called wage-price spiral](#).

Economists at Capital Economics wrote in a report on Monday that a wide ban on Russian energy could cause Russia’s economy to contract by as much as 25 percent, but the global fallout would be significant. The pace of inflation in advanced economies could double, and the eurozone could fall into recession.

“As Russia is a large supplier of energy to European industry, a collapse in Russian energy trade would precipitate [power rationing](#) in parts of Europe, which in turn would rupture supply chains and could stoke additional inflationary pressure globally,” [Caroline Bain](#), chief commodities economist at Capital Economics, said.

GasBuddy, which tracks gasoline prices, predicts that gasoline prices in the United States could soon hit an average of \$4.50 a gallon, with prices reaching as high as \$6 in California.

“There are few words to describe the unprecedented rise in gasoline prices over the last week, with massive spikes coast to coast in both gasoline and diesel prices, as oil prices jump to their highest since 2008,” said Patrick De Haan, GasBuddy’s head of petroleum analysis. “As we lose a major global producer under the weight of deserving bipartisan sanctions for invading a sovereign country, the cost is high.”

Republicans and Democrats have [worked in](#) lock step to ratchet up pressure on the White House to prohibit the importation of Russian energy products. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Democrat of California, has repeatedly endorsed the move, telling reporters last week: “I’m all for that. Ban it.”

Some Democrats have privately expressed concern that Republicans may use any hike in gas prices as a political cudgel against them ahead of the midterm elections. But most have concluded that a ban on Russian oil is an important step.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Humanitarian crisis worsens in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/ukraine-humanitarian-crisis-russia.html
GIST	MYKOLAIV, Ukraine — Increasingly indiscriminate Russian shelling that has trapped and traumatized Ukrainian civilians magnified fears on Monday of an intensifying humanitarian crisis that has already

left tens of thousands without food, water, power or heat in besieged cities of southern Ukraine and elsewhere.

As hopes for even brief cease-fires flare and then just as quickly sputter, the Russian invasion, the biggest conflict to engulf Europe since World War II, has turned at least 1.7 million Ukrainians — half of them children — into refugees, according to the United Nations. Many are trapped in their own cities, pinned down by intense barrages from Russian forces.

In Mariupol, a southeast port in Moscow's cross hairs, desperate residents have gone for days without food, water and other essentials. And in the city of Mykolaiv, residents fled their beds for safety Monday when stymied Russian forces launched a deadly predawn barrage at a military barracks.

"They attacked our city dishonorably, cynically, while people were sleeping," Vitaliy Kim, the governor of the Mykolaiv region, said in a Facebook posting.

With a third round of negotiations between Ukraine and Russia ending inconclusively on Monday, the fighting raged on. Late in the evening, the commander in chief of Ukraine's military, Valery Zaluzhny, said warplanes and an antiaircraft missile had downed two Russian planes near Kyiv, the capital. Several large explosions were heard in Kyiv, but it was not immediately possible to confirm the commander's account.

Although it is often hard to verify the competing claims of success on the battlefield, there is general agreement that Russia's military has failed to take any major city in its effort to subdue the Western-leaning country that President Vladimir V. Putin has vowed to subjugate.

Though many times larger than their adversary and enjoying more advanced weapons and air superiority, Russian forces have become bogged down just about everywhere, struggling with logistical problems, apparent poor troop morale and tactical errors that Ukrainian troops have exploited.

Unable to make major military gains, the Russians are carrying out a campaign of indiscriminate bombing that is terrorizing the residents of Ukrainian cities and villages.

In Mariupol, Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to the Ukrainian government, said the city had neither medicine, heat nor a functioning water system. Attempts to distribute supplies and help people evacuate were scrapped over the weekend in the face of Russian bombardment.

Doctors Without Borders, the medical charity that works in conflict zones, said it had received "harrowing reports" from staff members trapped in Mariupol. "Safe passage for those willing and able to escape should be urgently assured in Mariupol and across war affected areas inside Ukraine," the group said in a statement.

Officials at the United Nations, which so far has been powerless to stop the war, pleaded for combatants to pause long enough for trapped civilians to leave conflict zones. "Reliable and predictable 'windows of silence' and 'safe passage' are urgently needed to relocate people whose lives are at risk," said Amin Awad, the U.N. crisis coordinator for Ukraine.

On Monday, the Kremlin offered an evacuation plan of its own, galling Ukrainian leaders. Ukrainian civilians, it said, should be taken to Russia — that is, to the invader — or to its ally Belarus. Ukrainian officials denounced the proposal as propaganda, and said it was meant to distract attention from the Russian shelling of areas where civilians are trying to flee.

The heavy Western economic sanctions slapped on Russia in response to the invasion threatened to grow even more intense on Monday as American lawmakers advanced a bipartisan measure to suspend normal trade relations with Moscow and ban U.S. purchases of Russian oil.

The mere possibility of such action, which could severely restrict a crucial Russian export, sent global oil prices above \$119 a barrel, the highest in 14 years, and helped push average gasoline prices above \$4 a gallon in the United States. The stock market had its worst day since October 2020.

With Mr. Putin demonstrating resolve to impose Soviet-style suppression to control the narrative of the war at home, most signs pointed to a worsening conflict that risks spilling into Ukraine's NATO alliance neighbors. That development would pose an extreme test for President Biden and could put the United States and Russia, which have the world's biggest nuclear weapons arsenals, on a trajectory toward direct combat.

"Don't talk to me about half full/half empty: I'm someone who's generally happy there's water in the glass," Ian Bremmer, president of the Eurasia Group, a political risk research organization, said in a newsletter to readers and clients about the Ukraine crisis. "But I'm decidedly worried about where the conflict with Russia is heading."

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who was touring NATO's small Baltic state members on Monday to assure them of the U.S. commitment to their defense, received a somewhat skeptical reception. Lithuania's president, Gitanas Nauseda, told Mr. Blinken that strengthening military deterrence in the Baltics is "no longer enough" to dissuade Mr. Putin, who has said he wants NATO forces to vacate all the former Soviet-bloc republics in Eastern Europe.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, who has outmaneuvered Russian attempts to portray him as weak and intimidated, said he expected more heavy shelling of Ukrainian cities in the coming days. Already, said one of his advisers, Mykhailo Podoliak, 202 schools, 34 hospitals and more than 1,500 residential buildings have been destroyed since the war began. Nearly 1,000 towns and villages have been completely deprived of light, water and heat, he said.

Mr. Zelensky spoke from his office in Kyiv on Monday night, the first time he had been seen there since the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24. In a video posted on Facebook, he said he was not in hiding and not afraid of anyone.

In Mykolaiv, the southern city that lies directly in the path of Russian forces driving toward Odessa, the famed Black Sea port, the invading army unleashed a ferocious artillery attack early Monday that struck residential neighborhoods with rockets and sent streams of people running for safety.

About 5 a.m., the city awoke to a barrage that lit the predawn sky. Residents sheltered in basements and truckloads of Ukrainian troops rushed to the east of the city, where the fighting appeared to be heaviest. At one point during the day, a fierce tank battle erupted between Russian forces and Ukrainian troops defending Mykolaiv's airport, with blasts that reverberated throughout the city.

The initial attack killed at least eight Ukrainian soldiers, who were sleeping in their barracks when they were struck by a Kalibr cruise missile, said Mr. Kim, the Mykolaiv region's governor. Another 19 were wounded and eight were still unaccounted for, he said.

By evening, the guns had died down, and Ukrainian officials declared that their forces had once again repelled the Russian onslaught.

"They are retreating and running away," Mr. Kim said, though this could not be independently verified. "Nothing remains of their tanks, as far as I understand."

The governor said a group of about 20 Russian soldiers had fled into the forest, and he urged residents to call the police should they encounter them.

Though the most intense shelling of the day in Mykolaiv occurred at frontline positions, rockets also rained down on civilian neighborhoods.

Several landed in dense apartment blocks in the far east of the city, shattering windows and sending shrapnel through walls and home appliances. There were no immediate reports of injuries, but residents were shaken, often invoking Mr. Putin's name with a torrent of profanity.

"Tell Putin that he is killing peaceful people," Olga Korolyova, 48, said through sobs as she stood in the kitchen of her broken home.

The glass had been blown out of Ms. Korolyova's front window and her front door had been destroyed. When the rockets struck, she said, she hid in her bathroom.

"He thinks that we are to submit to him?" she said of the Russian president. "I want him to go through what I went through this morning."

Viktor Voroboi had just returned to his bed after an early-morning cigarette on his balcony when a rocket hit, blowing out the balcony glass and showering him with debris. A day before, he had moved his mother into his apartment after her own neighborhood was bombed. Neither of them was injured Monday.

"I was lucky," Mr. Voroboi said, his voice still shaking. "It means an angel is protecting me."

Residents of an apartment block sheltered in a basement that normally serves as a gym; the sound of artillery fire shook the walls. One of them, Margarita Andreyeva, accused Russia of tarnishing what she described as a sacred victory over the Nazis in World War II, when the Ukrainians and the Russians fought together.

"Now, Germany is giving us weapons to defend ourselves from the Russians," she said. "This is absurd. What would our grandfathers think?"

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HEADLINE	03/07 Puerto Rico lifts mask mandate most places
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/07/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#puerto-rico-among-the-last-us-holdouts-with-a-mask-mandate-is-easing-restrictions
GIST	<p>The governor of Puerto Rico on Monday lifted the territory's mask mandate for most places, as one of the last holdouts in the United States eased Covid-19 restrictions.</p> <p>Even as the ferocious Omicron wave receded in recent weeks, Puerto Rico, along with Hawaii, had been an outlier in the United States, with mask mandates still in place even as local and state authorities around the mainland rushed to lift them.</p> <p>In a statement on Monday, the office of Puerto Rico's governor, Pedro R. Pierluisi, said that hospitalizations on the island have dropped so much that, starting on Thursday, masks would no longer be required in most indoor or outdoor venues.</p> <p>However, the Puerto Rico authorities still recommend that people wear masks in indoor areas where it is unclear if everyone is vaccinated. Masks will still be required in health care facilities and "long-term care homes" for older people.</p> <p>The move comes nearly two weeks after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggested that the vast majority of Americans could stop wearing masks as case numbers dropped to levels not seen since before the Omicron surge.</p> <p>"We can already say that our health system is not compromised," Mr. Pierluisi said in the statement, noting the island's high vaccination rate.</p>

Last year, Puerto Rico mounted one of the most successful vaccination campaigns in the United States. As of Monday, more than three-quarters of the island was fully vaccinated, compared with the country's overall rate of 65 percent, according to [New York Times databases](#).

The state of the pandemic in Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, has seesawed over the last two years. The island was one of the first areas of the United States to [order a lockdown](#), but after it relaxed restrictions, cases and hospitalizations surged in April 2021.

In December and January of this year, Puerto Rico had [a severe Omicron surge](#).

But, in step with the rest of the country, new cases on the island plummeted toward the end of January. On Monday, the governor's office emphasized that, while mask requirements were lifting, vaccines remained the best defense against the virus.

Children may still be required to wear masks at schools if the health department "deems necessary to prevent contagion," the statement said. Companies may still mandate masks if they choose.

The authorities also said people would no longer be required to show proof of vaccination to enter restaurants, community centers or other areas, and that capacity restrictions would be lifted in certain places.

Last week, four counties in Hawaii, the city of Boston and the states of Michigan, Illinois and Delaware [became the latest places](#) to lift some Covid restrictions.

Other U.S. territories, including [Guam](#) and the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#), have not lifted mask mandates.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Chicago teachers union vows to keep mask
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/07/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine#the-chicago-teachers-union-vows-to-fight-a-plan-to-lift-a-school-mask-mandate
GIST	<p>Chicago Public Schools has announced plans to lift a mask requirement in the third-largest U.S. school district starting next week, infuriating members of the teachers' union who stopped reporting to school buildings for a week in January to demand additional Covid-19 safeguards.</p> <p>The decision, announced on Monday, followed a legal fight in Illinois courts over school mask mandates, as well as recent moves by Gov. J.B. Pritzker and Mayor Lori Lightfoot to lift other virus rules as case numbers have plunged.</p> <p>But teachers' union officials vowed to file an unfair labor practices charge. They said the decision to roll back the mask mandate was premature, especially amid relatively low student vaccination rates, and said it was a violation of the deal that led them to return to classrooms early this year.</p> <p>"Today's move by Mayor Lightfoot and C.P.S. not only violates the union's agreement with the district, it ignores the impact that Covid-19 has on communities of color," the Chicago Teachers Union said in a statement. Black and Latino students make up more than 80 percent of the roughly 330,000 students in Chicago's public schools.</p> <p>An analysis of vaccination data by WBEZ, Chicago's public radio station, found that at nearly 75 percent of schools in the district, fewer than half of students had been fully vaccinated as of Feb. 22.</p> <p>In Chicago and across the country, few pandemic issues have been more contentious than whether to hold in-person classes and whether to require masks. Teachers in Chicago stopped reporting to classrooms shortly after winter break, during the worst of the Omicron surge, arguing that schools were not safe, a dispute that canceled classes.</p>

	<p>Back then, both the union and the district supported mandatory masking. But Mr. Pritzker, a Democrat, lifted a statewide mask order for schools last week. And school district leaders said improvement in Chicago's Covid outlook made it prudent to make masks optional in schools there beginning next Monday.</p> <p>"C.P.S. was one of the first to require universal masking in schools, and we would not be moving to a mask-optional model unless the data and our public health experts indicated that it is safe for our school communities," Pedro Martinez, the district's chief executive, said in a statement.</p> <p>Cook County, which includes Chicago, was averaging more than 11,000 new cases a day at the height of the labor dispute in January. The county is now averaging about 600 new cases daily, and hospitalizations have also plunged. Masks became optional at most other places in the city last week, and proof of vaccination is no longer required to dine indoors.</p> <p>The school district had faced legal pressure to withdraw its mask mandate. The Chicago Tribune reported that Thomas DeVore, a lawyer who lives in Southern Illinois and who is seeking the Republican nomination for state attorney general, filed a motion in a downstate court last week asking a judge to block enforcement of the mask mandate in Chicago schools.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Seattle record high gas prices
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/seattles-record-high-gas-prices-leave-drivers-gas-stations-with-tough-choices/
GIST	<p>The 76 gas station in Seattle's Laurelhurst neighborhood offers new messages each week on its sign — one meant to be heartfelt and the other funny, says owner Neal Zeavy.</p> <p>On Monday, one read "Be a rainbow in somebody else's cloud," by Maya Angelou. On the other side: "Hey Putin. Go (expletive) yourself."</p> <p>The latter has drawn laughs from customers and is especially relevant this week, Zeavy said.</p> <p>As gasoline prices continue to soar in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the national average price hit its highest level since 2008 on Monday, at \$4.065 a gallon, according to AAA. Prices are climbing even faster in Washington state, where the average statewide price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas hit \$4.449 — a new state record.</p> <p>In the metropolitan area encompassing Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, the average price was \$4.630 a gallon, up 45 cents from last week and about \$1.30 from last year, according to AAA. Some gas stations on Capitol Hill and in West Seattle on Monday reported prices as high as \$5 per gallon.</p> <p>Russia's attack on Ukraine, forcing more than 1 million residents to flee, is disrupting the global energy market. Some refineries, traders and banks, afraid of violating sanctions, have stopped buying crude oil from Russia, which sells 10% of the world's oil and more than a third of the natural gas used in the European Union.</p> <p>Prices were already accelerating due to pandemic-related supply chain issues and inflation, which has jumped nationally and in Seattle. In February, the Labor Department reported a 7.6% increase in Seattle consumer goods and services, the highest increase since 1981.</p> <p>Drivers — including Uber and Lyft drivers who are seeing their take-home pay plummet — and businesses are facing tough choices as they feel the pain at the pump.</p> <p>Zeavy was selling a gallon for \$4.79 on Monday, a 30-cent increase from a week ago. The price is up to the station on 25th Avenue to set, he said, but the amount he is charged by companies changes daily.</p>

Typically the price fluctuates a few cents each day. When Russia invaded Ukraine, it jumped 22 cents in one night, he said. It's the exact opposite of what happened during the early pandemic lockdown when gas would drop "multiple of dimes" every day, he said.

Zeavy said he's not sure whether the station will keep increasing the price or try to eat the costs. Laurelhurst is not as price-sensitive as other areas in Seattle and there are not many gas stations in the immediate vicinity to compete with, he said. Still, if the price gets too high, people might go elsewhere.

"You can't run a nonprofit, so we do our best to try and balance it," he said.

For the most part, Zeavy said people have been supportive of his business, connecting rising costs to sanctions against Russia. A Quinnipiac University poll [released Monday](#) found 71% of Americans would support banning Russian oil, even if it means paying more, if it would end the war in Ukraine.

One customer fueling up Monday afternoon got only \$20 worth of gas — enough to get her to the Costco in Redmond to fill up the rest of her tank. Sara, who declined to give her last name, said she likes to support Seattle's local businesses and sympathizes with affected Russians and Ukrainians. But the recent price hikes, she said, have been too much.

It typically costs Angel Leocona, a mechanical designer, about \$30 to fill up his eight-gallon tank. The \$10 increase is manageable since he works from home and does not drive frequently, he said. However, if his office in Bellevue decides to go back in person next month, Leocona is thinking about taking the bus.

Austin Smith came to fill up his car at the 76 gas station because it was the closest, not because of costs. He, too, said the \$10 increase to fill his car wasn't too bad since he gets gas about once a month.

But for Mubarek Gobena, a full-time ride-hail driver from Burien, the hikes have been the latest factor preventing him from making a livable wage driving for Lyft and Uber.

Last month, Gobena said he netted \$4,700 from riders and took home \$2,050 to cover both his living expenses and operational costs, like gas. Filling up his hybrid Honda Fit twice a week used to cost around \$60, he said. Now, it's close to \$100.

The ride-hailing apps have continued to take a heavy chunk of payments from riders, despite rising gas prices, he said. "We are a backbone of the state's economy, but [Uber and Lyft] are not treating us like that."

A campaign aimed at getting the companies to help drivers with fuel costs has gathered more than 5,500 signatures on organizing platform Coworker.org. [The petition](#) calls for Uber and Lyft to take a smaller commission from fares and to pay drivers the mileage to pick up a passenger from the point where the request was accepted to the destination, [Bloomberg reported](#).

The companies have struggled to find enough drivers to meet resurgent customer demand — creating higher wait times and fares. The companies' leaders say supply has substantially improved since they first began doling out incentives and bonuses last year to lure drivers back, according to Bloomberg, which reported recent weekly earnings reports signal driver inventory hasn't kept up post-omicron.

Gobena, a volunteer organizer for the Drivers Union, said he always fills up his car when he drives a passenger to Federal Way, or other places in south King County where prices are lower.

"If I'm in Bellevue or downtown Seattle, I would never think about getting gas there," he said.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Far-right militia groups northern California
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/03/07/california-far-right-militia/

REDDING, Calif. — The far right is rising in the ranchland of Northern California, using special elections and veiled intimidation to spread political influence across a historically conservative region of this deeply liberal state.

The movement is rooted here in Shasta County and includes the support of a roughly decade-old militia. The gains it has achieved have come at the expense of moderate Republicans, who for generations fit the small-government, light-regulation ethic that guided political life here.

No longer.

The combination of California's pandemic-prompted mask regulations and President Donald Trump's reelection loss have fused together a conservative group of angry mothers, militia leaders and disaffected Republicans adrift in a blue state. Trumpists are voting out Trumpists. Veteran Republican politicians are seeing their terms cut short.

Last month, the movement successfully recalled a Republican member of the Shasta County Board of Supervisors, a Redding native and former police chief. Supervisor Leonard Moty's ousting means that the five-member board now has a far-right majority. Two open supervisor seats are up for election later this year.

What the movement will do with its increasing power remains unclear. But, just as it has across the country, its leaders have pushed against public health mandates and brought a sharp edge to once-civil local politics. Members, backed by the militia, have paid particular attention to Black activism, gun rights and rules preventing businesses from operating as they have wished. Homeless programs are also on the block.

The architect is Carlos Zapata, a retired Marine, militia member and restaurateur who raises bucking bulls on his ranch just outside this city, a hub of what locals refer to as "the north state." Zapata filmed and podcast much of the recall campaign. He called his project "Red White and Blueprint," a pointed invitation to neighboring conservative counties and others across the West to follow suit.

"This is a weird pie we've baked and I'm still trying to figure out exactly what the flavor is," Zapata said during a recent interview in his light-filled living room on his ranch about 10 miles east of this city. "But we're going to keep documenting this and look to help others because all government for us right now is local."

The effort is already spreading.

In Nevada County, southeast of here, an angry electorate has accused its Board of Supervisors of "crimes against humanity" for imposing mask mandates and using coronavirus-infection tracing. A petition drive is underway to recall the entire five-member board.

At the state level, a self-acknowledged member of the Proud Boys, some of whose members subscribe to a white nationalist philosophy, is running for an assembly seat. The candidate, Jeffrey Erik Perrine, was expelled from the Sacramento County Republican Party.

Here in Shasta County the movement that successfully secured the board majority is backing two supervisor candidates later this year and others for sheriff, school superintendent and district attorney.

The group also plans to contest the office of registrar of voters, a normally unchallenged clerical position that because of Trump's false election-fraud claims has taken on new importance.

"But there is no real policy plan and that's really what terrifies me," said Supervisor Mary Rickert, who was an original target of the recall until organizers failed to collect enough signatures to get her name on the ballot.

Rickert, 69, has lived in the county for nearly half a century. She and her husband are successful beef ranchers, devout Catholics, and, in her words, “the most boring people in Shasta County.” She has six grandchildren. She voted for Trump.

She was first elected to the board in 2016. But in the past year, Rickert has received graphic death threats, including an image of her face smashed in with a rock, for her role on the board and her support of mask mandates. She is not sure whether she will run again in two years.

“People are not paying attention,” she said. “I don’t think they understand the consequences of what is happening.”

Rickert is not the only one uncomfortable with the county’s direction. Within days of the recall, Donnell Ewert, head of the county’s Health and Human Services Agency, resigned after nine years on the job. He cited the political tumult as one reason.

“What is going to happen to all the programs we have put in place when this takeover happens?” Rickert said, referring to housing for the homeless, mental health and fire-protection policies the board approved before the shift. “And now who in their right mind would get involved in politics here as a moderate Republican?”

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Once split between north and south, California is divided now more along an east-west line that takes in large parts of the restive north.

The coastal cities are among the most liberal places in the nation. Sacramento, the capital, is controlled by Democrats, who hold veto-proof majorities in both State House chambers. Last year, nearly 70 percent of Shasta County voters supported Gavin Newsom’s recall, which the Democratic governor defeated easily statewide.

This region has a history of angry, anti-establishment politics with roots that long precede the rise of Trump. It has viewed the cosmopolitan coasts with suspicion, minority populations as possible threats, and Sacramento as an obstacle to the frontier-freedom they believe once defined the state. Nearly 9 in 10 Shasta residents are white.

The county helps form a crescent of rural communities, including some in southern Oregon, that have pushed at various times for independence. The goal over decades has been to form “the state of Jefferson,” and even today, some churches here conclude end-of-service prayers with the invocation, “Lord, please grant us our 51st state.”

This region of dry rolling plains is carved by the Sacramento River, the area’s lifeblood, and ringed by a tonsure of snow-tipped peaks. A frontier ethic prevails among many here, and that explains in part why the region is out of sync with the state’s prevailing strictness on gun control.

More than 12,000 residents of Shasta County, population 182,000, have conceal-carry permits. Local officials say that is among the highest proportions of any county in the state.

“You have here this truly rebellious group of people, who can’t stand the government, until of course they need the government for anything,” Ron Hughes, a justice-system employee who describes himself as a conservative Democrat, said on a smoke break recently.

“It’s so frustrating to see this divide over issues that don’t seem to matter to many of us,” said Hughes, a 57-year-old Redding native. “And now so many relatively radical conservatives are gearing up for some weird political war that we’re not interested in.”

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Moty is 68 years old and, for most of his life, he has held public office here in Shasta County.

His hair is light gray and neatly groomed, his crisp polo shirt bears a small crest of the University of Notre Dame, his alma mater. Everyone at Corbett's, a downtown diner, knows his name. Many whispered condolences one recent post-recall morning.

The most striking aspect of his appearance, though, might be the sky-blue rubber bracelet he wears around one wrist: "Covid-19 Vaccinated." The message is both a statement of pride and the reason, in large part, he lost his office.

About half of eligible Shasta County residents chose to get vaccinated, 30 percentage points below the state average. The county never truly enforced the state-mandated business lockdowns and, Moty said, never cited a single business for staying open against the rules.

Yet the conservatives here felt government oppression, an infringement of personal liberty that first a few, then many more, organized to roll back. Newsom lifted the statewide mask mandate earlier this month, but that has done little to slow the conservative push.

"I think you see it all over the nation — that Trump changed people's behavior. He made it OK to say things and do things no one ever did," said Moty, a self-described Reagan Republican, which he defined as "fiscally conservative and socially moderate."

"This is a movement now that wants to be in charge of everything and to make sure there is no one to tell them what they have to do," he continued.

Moty served for more than three decades in the Redding Police Department, including six years as its chief. This is a region with higher-than-average drug-overdose and suicide rates, where homelessness is prevalent, and where wildfire in recent years has become a threat as tangible as Mount Shasta rising in the near distance.

In 2008, Moty ran for a Board of Supervisors seat and won. He was serving his fourth term, although the recall cut it two years short. The board position is technically nonpartisan, but all members are Republicans.

Initially, Rickert and Supervisor Joe Chimenti were also targets of the recall petition drive. But not enough signed on to recall those two, and "Recall Shasta," as the group is known, focused all its attention on Moty. Neither Chimenti nor Supervisor Les Baugh will run for reelection in November.

The recall got outside help — a lot of it. A former Shasta County resident, Reverse Anselmo, gave more than \$400,000 to the recall effort. Anselmo used to own an eponymous winery and popular restaurant here. He wanted to build a chapel so he could host wedding ceremonies and receptions, but the county said he did so without proper permits.

"Shasta County is just not a place people like being told what to do," said Doni Chamberlain, 65, who is editor-in-chief of a fiery online news site called A News Cafe. "When you take all these groups together, at the center of the Venn diagram is freedom, a freedom to do whatever they want."

Anselmo's project fell apart — the chapel had been at least partially built already — and the millionaire sold off the property and returned to Connecticut. The grudge, however, remained firmly in place for years. The amount he gave to the recall is roughly 10 times what a Shasta County supervisors race usually costs to win.

Anselmo is hard to pin down. A man answering a cellphone that previously rang through to his voice mail answered with an obscenity when a Washington Post reporter asked why he is sending money to Shasta County. He hung up and did not answer a second call.

Some of Moty's critics say they voted to recall him in part because a grand jury found that he improperly received law-enforcement escorts into his neighborhood during the 2018 Carr fire. The grand jury concluded that Moty did not break the law.

But conservatives acknowledge that the reason for the recall was that Moty, like several of his board colleagues, did not do enough to oppose Newsom's lockdowns and mask mandates. The board's shift to virtual meetings during coronavirus surges also infuriated conservatives, who felt locked out of their government even though the meetings were streamed virtually.

The board did write several letters to Newsom expressing concern that the blanket restrictions would not work in some rural counties, such as Shasta, which are more lightly populated and reliant on small businesses. But the conservatives here wanted defiance, a board statement that the mandates in this region were null and void.

"That's what's such a farce about all of this — you can't tell the state what you are going to do," Moty said. "This is no longer the place I grew up and that is not for the better. I grew up in a place where you could disagree civilly."

He will be replaced by Tim Garman, a proudly unvaccinated member of the nearby Happy Valley Union School Board.

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A week after the recall, Zapata appeared before the Board of Supervisors on his best behavior. Moty's chair sat empty.

"We beat an adversary, not an enemy," Zapata told the board, reading from a script he said was designed to "make sure I get this right."

"Yelling at supervisors and gloating in victory may feel good for a minute and I am certainly not without fault," he said. "But we can do better. Let us be gracious in victory."

The short remarks, designed to set a modest tone for an audience in star-spangled cowboy hats, "Let's go Brandon" T-shirts and MAGA caps, marked a sharp departure from his first comments before the board.

Those comments were made during the open forum for public remarks. They amounted to a defiant warning at a time when the state and local supervisors were considering new public health regulations as the pandemic lingered, a note to supervisors that they had been put on a watch list for recall.

"Right now we're being peaceful," Zapata told the board in August 2020, his first appearance in the chambers. "But it's not going to be peaceful much longer."

The comments made him the face of the movement, even though "Recall Shasta" emphasizes that the grassroots work was done primarily by "moms and grandmoms."

Among his first moves that first pandemic year was to gather local business leaders and agree to defy the state's restrictions and mask mandates. His business, the Palomino Room, a 75-year-old bar and restaurant south of here in Red Bluff, would set the example.

"We became a magnet for people, a kind of cry for freedom," Zapata said. "The word 'patriot' gets thrown around a lot but it was kind of a patriotic duty, keeping someplace open where people could be normal."

Zapata was born in Los Angeles, a Peruvian American who moved to Shasta County more than 25 years ago. He attended college here, then joined the Marines, where he said he served six years of active duty stateside and overseas, including in Iraq.

He lives along a lovely stretch of rolling ranchland. The drive along Silver Bridge Road to his place is lined with churches, homes with American flags flapping from front-yard poles, some also flying “Trump Back in 2024” banners.

In his home of white brick and blond wood, Zapata acts the self-effacing rogue, the guy who has the courage to say what everyone, in his view, is thinking.

His documentary-style Red White and Blueprint project, which he calls “the media arm of the recall movement,” is simply a lesson plan, as he explains it, to other conservatives fighting for notice in a blue state. There is marketing merchandise for sale, too.

The charm masks an edge.

Last August, as an increasing number of Shasta residents were reporting businesses breaking state pandemic rules, Zapata appeared next to Woody Clendenen, who heads the local militia and who referred to those notifying authorities as “ratting” out their neighbors.

“Go move off down to San Francisco,” Clendenen said. “Or somewhere where your kind live because I don’t want you here.”

Zapata spoke next, warning those watching that “we also are collecting intelligence, we also have people on the streets.”

“We know where you live, we know who your family is, we know your dog’s name,” Zapata said. “So if you think for one second we are going to let you spy on us without us doing our due diligence and spying on you, you’re absolutely wrong.”

The remarks, coming amid the recall effort, were chilling.

Zapata said they were a pointed response, in part, to the fact that his own personal information had been put online by opponents. A few months later, voter turnout for Moty’s recall was about 40 percent — nearly half the turnout rate for the Newsom recall — and local officials here say some voters probably stayed away out of fear.

“Scared of what? I’m scared of losing my rights,” he said. “I’m scared of losing my means of making a living, of taking care of my family.”

Zapata acknowledges his sins — “I love to fight, ever since I was a boy,” he said — and admitted that there are “too many skeletons” in his closet to ever run for office.

In conversation, he also casts his own politics in a not-what-you’d-think sort of way. He sends his children to a nearby Christian school but said he is “anti-church.” He said he supports gay rights and is interested in an on-again-off-again single-payer health insurance plan in California.

When the talk shifts to race, though, the message changes.

“What has Black Lives Matter actually done for the Black community?” Zapata said. “I want to know what progress are they actually making?”

A week or so after George Floyd’s murder in May 2020, a relatively small Black Lives Matter demonstration took place here, setting much of the almost entirely white community on edge. The event unfolded peacefully and, among the Shasta County deputies and city police, scores of armed members of the 1st California State Militia Regiment watched.

“That was the militia’s coming-out party,” said Chamberlain, the journalist. “I had no idea how many there were.”

Nathan Pinkney, a local chef, is one of the few Black residents in the county. He said, laughing, “I know all the others.”

He is also one of the county’s few Democrats, and amid the rise of the recall movement, he decided to begin producing satirical videos that he hoped would expose what he called the racist underpinnings of the movement.

“The BLM protests really set these people off,” said Pinkney, 33, who has spent most of his life in Shasta County and rides around Redding on a scooter. “They just went into this tantrum.”

In response to some of the local activism, Pinkney created Buford White, a redneck caricature who starred on his YouTube channel.

He said that, while their politics diverge, he had always gotten along with Zapata. But when he called to ask Zapata what he thought of his Buford White character, Zapata told him they would discuss “how funny it is” the next time they met.

That next time ended in a fight outside the Blade and Barrel restaurant where Pinkney then worked.

“I was just tired of hearing about all this ‘God-fearing Republican’ stuff and what patriots they all were. Now I hear the word ‘patriot’ and laugh,” Pinkney said. “All of this because they wouldn’t wear a little square of cloth over their faces to prevent killing old people.”

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Clendenen, who heads the local militia, has a barber shop on Main Street in Cottonwood. It is a collection point for the committed conservative and the simply curious.

The conservative paraphernalia is everywhere, cluttering his shop.

On this day, Clendenen, too, has trimmed back the decor following the recall just as Zapata had toned down his speech to the board. His Confederate flag, for one, remains furled in a corner. It commonly holds a pride of place in the shop — a conversation starter, Clendenen says, about states’ rights.

But he keeps his half-humorous price list in a prominent place. While a buzz cut will regularly cost you \$10, if you are a liberal, he charges 10 times that. Any customer who has been vaccinated is charged a \$5 penalty fee.

Clendenen, who is 55, said militia members played little role in the recall except as voters. Frequent acts of resistance to state rules, though, helped keep the movement energized. On one occasion, the militia helped stage the Cottonwood Rodeo two months into the state-ordered restrictions, drawing 4,000 maskless cowboys and fans to the town in direct defiance of state public health orders at the time.

Patrick Henry Jones, a Shasta County supervisor and owner of Jones’ Fort, a gun and ammunition shop, works with political volunteers at his store in Redding. (Washington Post photo by Melina Mara)

Patrick Henry Jones, a Shasta County supervisor and owner of Jones’ Fort, a gun and ammunition shop, works with political volunteers at his store... (Washington Post photo by Melina Mara)More
But the place to find the outlines of the movement’s future is in Jones’ Fort, a guns and ammunition shop run by Shasta County Supervisor Patrick Henry Jones, elected in 2020 with a \$100,000 financial boost from Anselmo.

One campaign ad featured Jones in a shin-length duster, wearing a cowboy hat and gripping a rifle in one hand, with the words “The 2nd Amendment Matters” written above a rippling American flag.

	<p>In one of his first acts as supervisor, Jones unlocked the board chamber's doors, which his colleagues had closed for COVID-19 quarantine reasons, to allow in residents who had been clamoring to get in for months. It was the day before the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.</p> <p>"They were not listening to the people who hired them," said Jones, who served for nearly a decade on the Redding City Council. "And they didn't realize how destructive this would be to Shasta County."</p> <p>The large shop is busy early on a weekday.</p> <p>"This is Shasta County," Jones, who carries a 9-mm pistol, said with a laugh. "We're always busy."</p> <p>A large portion of the front counter has been turned into a display for political pamphlets, bumper stickers and posters, featuring the next batch of candidates backed by the evolving recall movement.</p> <p>There is a waiting area in the shop, too, a nook where a pair of comfortable chairs sit under a buffalo head.</p> <p>On the coffee table, along with a few gun-related magazines, is a book by Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch titled, "A Republic, If You Can Keep It." Jones is not particularly impressed by the conservative justice, whom he believes has softened his once staunchly conservative values, like many of his neighbors.</p> <p>"What you are seeing right now is a course correction," Jones said. "This is a conservative county and the local government hasn't reflected that for years."</p> <p>"They had their chance," he continued. "And now it's mine. If they don't like it, fire me."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 DOD shuts Navy fuel tank facility Hawaii
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/pentagon-to-shut-down-leaking-fuel-tank-facility-in-hawaii/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The Defense Department will permanently shut down the Navy's massive fuel tank facility in Hawaii that leaked petroleum into Pearl Harbor's tap water, and will remove all the fuel, the Pentagon said Monday.</p> <p>Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said the decision by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is based on a new Pentagon assessment, but also is in line with an order from Hawaii's Department of Health to drain fuel from the tanks at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility.</p> <p>The tanks, built into the side of a mountain during World War II to protect them from enemy attack, had leaked into a drinking water well and contaminated water at Pearl Harbor homes and offices.</p> <p>Nearly 6,000 people, mostly those living in military housing at or near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam were sickened, seeking treatment for nausea, headaches, rashes and other ailments. And 4,000 military families were forced out of their homes and are in hotels.</p> <p>Lauren Wright remembers her skin peeling, feeling nauseous and vomiting. Her symptoms disappeared only when she stopped drinking, showering and washing dishes with her home's water.</p> <p>Since early December, Wright, her sailor husband and their three children ages 7 to 17 have been among the thousands of military families living in Honolulu hotels paid for by the Navy so they can have clean water.</p> <p>"I am happy because it is a step in the right direction. It should have happened a long time ago," Wright said. "Hopefully, they don't drag their feet and it moves quickly so another spill or leak doesn't happen again."</p>

She said her water at home still has a sheen and smell. The Wright family hopes to find a new home and said she and her family won't be drinking the water, even after officials sign off on its safety.

"My plan is not to use the water, or if we have to use it very, very little. I will not be drinking it, cooking with it," she said. "We've been looking at home filtration systems that we could use, but I don't trust it. I don't even want to bathe in it. I don't want to brush our teeth with it because I don't trust the water."

Austin spoke with Hawaii government leaders on Monday to inform them of the decision, which he said will protect the population and the environment, and will also lay the groundwork for a more secure military fueling system.

"This is the right thing to do," Austin said in a statement. "Centrally-located bulk fuel storage of this magnitude likely made sense in 1943, when Red Hill was built. And Red Hill has served our armed forces well for many decades. But it makes a lot less sense now."

Hawaii Gov. David Ige called it "great news for the people of Hawaii."

U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, said she has been encouraging the Pentagon to make the shutdown decision for weeks.

"I have said from day one that ensuring the health and safety of the residents of Oahu is my top priority and I share the community's big sigh of relief with this news," said Hirono, who is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Pentagon said it will move to a more dispersed fueling system for military ships and aircraft in the Indo-Pacific. Based on the new assessment, the expanded system will be more cost effective and provide greater security by spreading the fuel supply more broadly across the region.

The new plan, laid out in recommendations delivered to Austin by a study group, would increase the fuel contracts that the U.S. has with other territories and nations in the Indo-Pacific, and add several more tanker ships that are based at sea. There are currently less than a dozen tanker ships, so several more would have to be built.

An assessment team that had been studying how to make the tanks safe to operate will now determine how to shut the tanks down and remove the fuel in an environmentally safe way. The team must report back to Austin by the end of April with recommendations.

After the facility can operate again, the defueling will begin and the process is expected to take about a year, meaning it would be finished some time next year. Austin has asked the Navy secretary to plan a budget for all necessary corrective action for any prior fuel releases from the facility.

Austin said the department will also work with state, national and local leaders to clean up the contamination and consider other uses for the property after the fueling plant is closed. And the military will also provide health care to the families and workers affected.

U.S. Rep. Kaiali'i Kahele said the military must also make sure it cleans up the contaminated aquifer underneath the fuel tanks. The Navy's water system and Honolulu's municipal water utility use that aquifer.

"At this point, the extent of contamination and environmental damage is not yet known. We know fuel continues to drip, as we speak, from the rock formations into our fresh water aquifer right now," the Hawaii Democrat said in a statement.

Carmen Hulu Lindsey, chair of the board of trustees for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, commended Austin's decision, but said officials must continue to monitor the situation as the facility is drained.

“Being good stewards of Hawai’i’s natural resources is the expectation for all that use Hawaiian lands and water,” Lindsey said in a statement.

The tanks can hold 250 million gallons (1.1 billion liters) of fuel, and they are at less than half capacity right now. Officials said that 13 of the 20 tanks have fuel in them, two are permanently closed and five are being repaired.

The Navy hasn’t determined how the petroleum got in the water. Officials are investigating a theory that jet fuel spilled from a ruptured pipe last May and somehow entered a fire suppression system drain pipe. They suspect fuel then leaked from the second pipe on Nov. 20, sending it into the drinking water well.

Weeks after the leak was discovered, Hawaii state officials and members of Congress began to demand the shutdown of the facility.

The Navy in early February appealed the state’s closure order, and at the time Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said the appeal would give the military time “to make evidence-based and transparent decisions.”

Lawyers representing the Sierra Club of Hawaii, which intervened in the case, said the Navy must now drop its appeals lodged in state and federal court.

Kirby on Monday said the department realizes the closure of the fuel complex will not be a quick fix.

“We have work to do,” he said. “But we do believe that this decision by the Secretary today marks a significant first step in the path forward.”

U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said political leaders will need to make that the military follows through on its plans.

“In order to implement this decision, we’re going to have to provide additional resources and hold (the Department of Defense’s) feet to the fire through congressional oversight,” he said.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Worries? Schools drop mask mandates
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/mask-mandates-go-away-in-schools-but-parent-worries-persist/
GIST	<p>BOSTON (AP) — Major school districts around the country are allowing students into classrooms without masks for the first time in nearly two years, eliminating rules that stirred up intense fights among educators, school boards and parents throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>New York City became the latest school district to do away with its mask requirement Monday and Philadelphia is poised to lift its mandate Wednesday, joining big cities such as Houston and Dallas and a number of a states that made similar moves in the last week. Chicago schools will end their mask mandate next Monday.</p> <p>Parents, teachers and principals face a complicated balancing act in navigating the new rules. Some families are thrilled that their children no longer have to wear masks, while others say they’re still tentative and urging their kids to keep wearing face coverings for now. Teachers and principals are caught in the middle.</p> <p>In Anchorage, Alaska, School Superintendent Deena Bishop says lifting the mandate in the city’s nearly 100 public schools last week was a relief after months of acrimony even though there were some bumpy patches.</p>

Bishop says she has been made aware of a handful of comments teachers inadvertently made that “didn’t sit well” with students and their parents, such as a teacher singling out a young child whose parents decided to keep them wearing a mask and another who had made a student feel guilty about their decision not to wear one.

She said the instances served as “teachable moments” to remind staff that “a choice is a choice and that we need to honor that home’s choice.”

“There was a lot of angst, a lot of battles in the city over wearing masks, not wearing masks,” Bishop said. “So I’m glad that we’ve taken that fight away. All that has just subsided, and now we can go back to focus on learning.”

Falling infection rates and new federal health guidance are leading most of the remaining states with statewide school mask requirements to drop the mandates. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently issued new guidelines saying most Americans live in places where healthy people, including students, can safely take a break from wearing masks.

But those hesitant about ending school mask mandates often point to low childhood vaccination rates among American children. Only about a quarter of children ages 5 to 11 have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, and about 58% of children ages 12 to 17 are inoculated, the CDC says.

New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Illinois and Delaware rescinded their statewide school mask requirements recently. New Jersey and Rhode Island dropped theirs officially Monday while California, Oregon and Washington have jointly announced they’ll drop their statewide mandates effective March 12.

In many instances, the ultimate decisions are being made at the local school district level.

Officials in many large cities, such as Boston, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., have said they’ll keep mask rules for now, either until vaccination rates improve among their students, or they can work out agreements with teachers unions, which have been among those most vocal about keeping the mandates in place.

After Chicago schools announced Monday that masks will no longer be required as of March 14, the city’s teachers union vowed to take officials to court, saying the move will violate an agreement with the district to keep the mask rule through the end of the school year.

In New York City, elementary student Jack Jalaly ditched his mask Monday as they became optional in the nation’s largest school district.

“I think it’s nice because kids can finally see their teachers talk, and I also have a younger daughter who has spent all her time with no face, right?” said Jack’s mother, Andrea. “So for little kids, it’s really great because you can see the way words are pronounced and you can see spellings.

But third-grader Derrick Carter-Jacob kept his mask on as New York eliminated the requirement. “I don’t want to get COVID,” he said.

“Leave it on. There’s no reason for him to take it off until basically everybody is safe,” said his parent, Michael Jacob. “I want my son to be safe. I’m sorry. That’s the way I see it.”

John Bracey, a Latin teacher at Belmont High School in suburban Boston, says he intends to keep wearing his hospital-grade N-95 respirator through the end of the academic year even as district officials are expected to decide on their school mandate later this week.

The 41-year-old Bellingham resident said he and his wife have also decided to keep his two young school-age children wearing masks this week even though their district lifted the requirement Monday.

“I have major concerns on so many levels,” Bracey said. “It appears to be a decision made to benefit the most privileged and leaves everyone else to their own devices. We’re sacrificing the health of immunocompromised students, elderly staff and those of us with young children. I just can’t find a public health or moral justification for removing them.”

In Needham, another Boston suburb, school administrators waited until Monday — a full week after the state eased its mask requirement — in part to prepare students for the transition this week to what they call a “mask-friendly environment,” says School Superintendent Daniel Gutekanst.

He said the work, which included posters and informational videos created by district officials, appears to have paid off, with no reports of major disputes or other issues around mask wearing after classes ended Monday.

Melissa Bello says her two school-age children were among those that gladly removed their masks Monday.

She says her 8-year-old son has hearing loss in both ears and has been complaining of having trouble understanding people in school with everyone wearing masks the last two years.

“He’s working harder everyday in school and coming home more tired,” Bello said. “There’s not enough consideration for those kinds of tradeoffs in these mask mandates.”

But Jason Chan, another parent in Needham, said his two school-age children went in Monday still wearing masks — and likely still will through the week before the family reassesses.

He believes his children, which include a 5-year-old son who has never known schooling without a mask, would be fine wearing them until the end of the school year, if it came down to it.

“Honestly, the kids have been doing better than the parents with the masks,” Chan said. “I hear a lot of parents upset but kids just don’t look at it the same way in terms of this civil rights issue. It’s like wearing a hat or a sweater for them.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 Study: Covid may cause changes to brain
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/health/covid-brain-changes.html
GIST	<p>COVID-19 may cause greater loss of gray matter and tissue damage in the brain than naturally occurs in people who have not been infected with the virus, a large new study finds.</p> <p>The study, published Monday in the journal Nature, is believed to be the first involving people who underwent brain scans both before they contracted COVID and months after. Neurological experts who were not involved in the research said it was valuable and unique, but they cautioned that the implications of the changes were unclear and did not necessarily suggest that people might have lasting damage or that the changes might profoundly affect thinking, memory or other functions.</p> <p>The study, involving people 51 to 81 years old, found shrinkage and tissue damage primarily in brain areas related to sense of smell; some of those areas are also involved in other brain functions, the researchers said.</p> <p>“To me, this is pretty convincing evidence that something changes in brains of this overall group of people with COVID,” said Dr. Serena Spudich, chief of neurological infections and global neurology at the Yale School of Medicine, who was not involved in the study.</p> <p>But, she cautioned: “To make a conclusion that this has some long-term clinical implications for the patients I think is a stretch. We don’t want to scare the public and have them think, ‘Oh, this is proof that everyone’s going to have brain damage and not be able to function.’”</p>

The study involved 785 participants in UK Biobank, a repository of medical and other data from about half a million people in Britain. The participants each underwent two brain scans roughly three years apart, plus some basic cognitive testing. In between their two scans, 401 participants tested positive for the coronavirus, all infected between March 2020 and April 2021.

The other 384 participants formed a control group because they had not been infected with the coronavirus and had similar characteristics to the infected patients in areas like age, sex, medical history and socioeconomic status.

With normal aging, people lose a tiny fraction of gray matter each year. For example, in regions related to memory, the typical annual loss is between 0.2% and 0.3%, the researchers said.

But COVID patients in the study — who underwent their second brain scan an average of 4 1/2 months after their infection — lost more than noninfected participants, experiencing between 0.2% and 2% additional gray matter loss in different brain regions over the three years between scans. They also lost more overall brain volume and showed more tissue damage in certain areas.

“I find it surprising in the sense of how much more was lost and how generalized it is,” said Spudich, who has studied the neurological effects of COVID. “I wouldn’t have expected to see quite so much percentage change.”

The effects may be particularly notable because the study involved mostly people who — like the majority of COVID patients in the general population — were mildly affected by their initial COVID infection, not becoming sick enough to need hospitalization.

The study’s lead author, Gwenaëlle Douaud, a professor in the department of clinical neurosciences at the University of Oxford, said that although the number of hospitalized patients in the study, 15, was too small to yield conclusive data, results suggested that their brain atrophy was worse than the mildly afflicted patients.

People who had COVID also showed greater decline than uninfected people on a cognitive test related to attention and efficiency in performing a complex task. But outside experts and Douaud noted that the cognitive testing was rudimentary, so the study is very limited in what it can say about whether the gray matter loss and tissue damage the COVID patients experienced affected their cognitive skills.

“None of them got thorough enough cognitive testing to know if they had significant deficits in these many regions where they found these changes in volume,” said Dr. Benedict Michael, an associate professor of neurological infections at the University of Liverpool, who is researching the neuropsychiatric effects of COVID and was not involved in the study. “We don’t know that it actually means anything for the patient’s quality of life or function.”

For example, although some of the largest gray matter loss was in areas related to smell, including the orbitofrontal cortex and parahippocampal gyrus, those areas are also involved in memory and other functions. But the COVID patients did not perform worse than noninfected participants on memory tests, Douaud said, although she added that the memory tests they took were brief and basic.

The main cognitive assessment in which COVID patients showed a deficit was the trail-making test, a connect-the-dots type of exercise involving alternating letters and numbers. COVID patients took longer to complete the task, which might suggest weaknesses in focus, processing speed and other skills.

Douaud said this diminished ability correlated with loss of gray matter in a specific region of the brain’s cerebellum. But the study doesn’t prove cause and effect, said Spudich, who also said that the cerebellum, primarily associated with balance, coordination and movement, “is not the first brain structure you think of” to explain changes in ability on the trail-making test.

One significant limitation to the study, Douaud said, is that researchers did not have information about people's symptoms, including whether they lost their sense of smell. The researchers also could not identify whether any patients had long COVID, so it is unclear if the findings relate to that long-term condition.

Differences between infected and uninfected people increased with age. On the trail-making test, for example, performance was similar in both groups for people in their 50s and early 60s, but the gap widened significantly after that. "I don't know if that's because younger people recover faster or they were not as affected to start with," Douaud said. "Could be either or it could be both."

Michael cautioned that the findings could not be extrapolated to the many younger people experiencing post-COVID brain fog and other cognitive issues. And since gray matter and tissue damage were measured at only one time-point after infection, "we don't know if it's just a transient change that gets better with recovery," he said.

Outside experts and the study's authors said the range of brain areas where COVID patients experience more gray-matter loss raised intriguing questions.

"There's no one part of the brain that does one thing," Douaud said. "There are parts of the brain in the infected participants with additional gray matter loss that have nothing to do with the smell, and the ones that are related to smell also are involved in other brain functions."

The cause of the brain changes is unclear. The authors mentioned theories including inflammation, evidence of which has been found in other studies, and "sensory deprivation" from disrupted sense of smell.

Dr. Avindra Nath, chief of the section on infections of the nervous system at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, who was not involved in the study, said another "critical question" was whether the brain changes could make COVID patients more prone to dementia or other deficits in the future.

And while the researchers did not find the same brain changes in patients with non-COVID pneumonia, Nath recommended studying patients with other coronaviruses or the flu "to see if these findings are distinct for COVID-19 or more generalizable."

Spudich said the study's greatest value may be its indication that "there's been something that's happened in the brain in these people," adding that "I think people have felt that it's so vague, so hard to measure."

Other scientists can now build on these findings, she and others said.

"It's an important study; they've done good work," Michael said. "Now we need to do the studies to look at cognition and psychiatric symptoms and behavioral stuff and neurological stuff and find out what does this mean for patients."

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HEADLINE	03/07 King Co. program targets opioid overdoses
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/king-county-launches-pilot-program-aimed-at-curbing-opioid-overdoses/281-f8a45f48-e772-4a6f-92ea-428351a7451f
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — In the area Eastside Fire & Rescue serves, there have been 67 fatal overdoses since January of 2020.</p> <p>Battalion Chief Greg Garat has been there to respond to the 911 calls.</p> <p>"With the fentanyl that's getting mixed into the drugs, you never know what you're going to get," Garat said.</p>

At a Friday news conference about crime in downtown Seattle, Frank Tarentino III, special agent in charge of the [Drug Enforcement Administration Seattle Field Division](#), said drugs are fueling the problem.

"Drug trafficking and gun violence are directly linked," Tarentino said.

Last year, the DEA Seattle Field Division seized enough pure fentanyl to kill every person in Washington state, according to Tarentino.

"We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to reduce the drug-related violence," he said. At Eastside Fire & Rescue, Jamie Formisano said the data tells the story with [King County's number of fatal overdoses](#) moving in an alarming direction.

"King County Public Health brought this program to us almost a year ago because they're seeing a rise in opioid overdoses," Formisano said.

After partnering and planning with Public Health - Seattle & King County, a new pilot program recently debuted. In three weeks time, [Eastside Fire & Rescue](#) has provided three Naloxone Leave-Behind Kits.

"It contains two doses of Naloxone," said Garat, adding that when they respond to non-fatal overdoses, they leave a kit behind.

"If they've overdosed, and this brings them back out of respiratory arrest, they still need to seek medical care because those opioids are still in their system," Garat said.

In Seattle, the city says it is moving more [police officers and resources](#) into the downtown core to combat a rise in crime, including drug-related offenses.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Canada new cruise ship Covid, vax rules
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/canada-crusie-ship-covid-guidance/281-45b954a0-bd43-4ace-a47a-a86eb4578a99
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The nation's neighbor to the north announced Monday it will begin welcoming cruise ships back to its waters beginning in April.</p> <p>Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra said the move comes along with a new public health framework that will help restart the industry's activity in Canada.</p> <p>The plan includes vaccination requirements for all crew and passengers as well as taking an antigen test at most one day before boarding the ship or a molecular test 72 hours before boarding.</p> <p>Passengers will also have to test before their scheduled arrival in Canada.</p> <p>"As Canadians continue to do their part by stepping up and rolling up their sleeves to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and practicing public health measures, our government continues to work hard to restart our economy safely and sustainably. We welcome cruise ships—an important part of our tourism sector—back to Canada, and we will continue working with partners to support this important industry," Alghabra said in a statement.</p> <p>While cruise ships in compliance with public health regulations have been allowed to enter Canadian waters since November 2021, the new guidance comes ahead of the busy Pacific Northwest cruise ship season.</p> <p>Officials with the Port of Seattle said the past two years have been very tough for the cruise industry in Seattle with virtually no season in 2020 and a late start to last year's season, which brought in a couple</p>

hundred million dollars to Seattle's economy. That's just a quarter of the \$900 million that the city averages during a normal cruise season. Officials are optimistic they'll hit that mark again for this upcoming season.

Stephanie Jones Stebbins, managing director of the maritime division at the Port of Seattle, said they expect to have 296 ships, which means "a lot of money into our economy."

"We know there are some businesses that rely on tourism that are just hanging on, so without this season I think the economic impact would really be devastating," Jones Stebbins said.

According to Canada, the cruise ship industry brings in more than \$4 billion for the country's economy, generates roughly 30,000 jobs and is considered "an important part of Canada's domestic tourism sector."

The cruise industry itself was hit hard by initial lockdowns caused by the pandemic and then scrutinized heavily as the omicron surge took hold.

At one point over the winter, all U.S. cruise ships had at least 0.1% of its passengers testing positive for COVID, leading to [numerous investigations](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A spokesperson for Seattle-based Holland America, which operates six Alaska cruises out of Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, said the company is thrilled to resume operations after the pandemic disruption.

"In a couple of short words, we're back," said Holland America Director of Public Relations Erik Elvejord. "I mean it's been two years since we've had a full season in Seattle, so super excited about it."

Port of Seattle officials said the season starts in April and runs through October. They expect some cruise ships to head to Canada in mid-April.

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HEADLINE	03/07 U-turn: Georgia expedites EU application
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/07/georgia-expedites-eu-application-in-policy-u-turn-russia-ukraine
GIST	<p>In a surprise U-turn, the government of Georgia has applied for EU membership just days after declaring it would not accelerate its application, as fears grow among the Georgian public that the Russian invasion might not stop with Ukraine.</p> <p>A day after Ukraine made its formal application for EU membership on Wednesday, Georgia responded to the pressure of overwhelming public protests and made its own request, along with Moldova.</p> <p>In 2008 Vladimir Putin ordered a Russian invasion of Georgia in a campaign that killed hundreds of Georgians, displaced more than 190,000 and resulted in the Russian occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which continues to this day.</p> <p>By signing the formal application for EU membership on Thursday, the Georgian prime minister, Irakli Garibashvili, moved up the original timetable, under which Georgia's application for EU membership would start in 2024.</p> <p>Only on Tuesday, the chair of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Irakli Kobakhidze, had told journalists that speeding up Georgia's application to the EU "could be counterproductive because we have to satisfy certain terms over the [next] two years".</p> <p>The Georgian government had also previously announced that it would not join international voices calling for sanctions against Russia. "I want to state clearly and unambiguously, considering our national</p>

interests and interests of the people, Georgia does not plan to participate in the financial and economic sanctions, as this would only damage our country and populace more,” Garibashvili said last week.

Since then, the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, has seen nightly protests, with tens of thousands of people taking to the streets in a show of solidarity with Ukraine and to call for Garibashvili’s resignation over what they consider a weak response to Russian aggression.

The Ukrainian leader, Volodymyr Zelensky, has accused Georgia of “holding an immoral position regarding sanctions” and recalled the Ukrainian ambassador to Georgia.

Founded by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Georgian Dream party is widely criticised for presiding over corruption, democratic backsliding and harbouring sympathy for Russian policies. Its reluctance to impose sanctions against Russia has been seen as evidence of the party’s alignment with Putin’s regime. “In this battle between Russia and the free world, today Georgia has a government that stands on the side of Russia,” MP Salome Samadashvili has said.

On Saturday, Mikhail Fishman, a prominent journalist at Russia’s independent TV Rain, which was taken off air by the Kremlin last week, was denied entry to Georgia even though his family and other Russians on his flight were reportedly allowed in.

Thursday’s announcement marks a volte-face, with Kobakhidze calling for EU bodies to review Georgia’s EU application “in an emergency manner and to make the decision to grant Georgia the status of an EU membership candidate”.

While the EU petition will appease some of the protesters, many observers are wary of interpreting the government’s U-turn as a sign of fully abandoning Russia and turning toward the west. Applying for EU membership is a lengthy process with no guarantee of success, and could fly under Putin’s radar while the Ukraine invasion continues, allowing Georgia in effect to hedge its bets.

“There was public pressure and petitions signed by thousands. They also knew Moldova would apply. The Georgian government saw this as a window of opportunity: if they missed it, the Georgian people wouldn’t tolerate it,” said Kornely Kakachia, head of the thinktank Georgian Institute of Politics.

“The Georgian government is playing realpolitik. They don’t know what the outcome of this war will be. And anyway, the Kremlin is busy now.”

Last week hundreds of Georgian volunteers were prevented from boarding a Ukrainian charter flight headed for Kyiv after the Georgian government blocked the plane from landing in Tbilisi. The plane was intended to deliver Georgian volunteers to Ukraine to join an international brigade fighting against Russian forces in the country.

Recent events have accelerated a growing divide between the Georgian government and its presidency under Salome Zourabichvili, who is publicly moving away from Russia. On Tuesday, after Georgian Dream said it would not expedite its EU application, Zourabichvili met in Brussels with the presidents of the European Commission and European Council, Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel, to call for the speedier reception of aspiring EU nations.

“You can try to frighten countries,” Zourabichvili said on CNN on Thursday. “But that doesn’t mean you change their orientation, that you change their determination to keep their independence.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 China tight quandary; ‘no wavering’ Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/asia/putin-ukraine-china-xi.html
GIST	On a frigid day in Beijing last month as the Winter Olympics were set to open , China’s leader, Xi Jinping, celebrated a diplomatic triumph with a banquet for his honored guest, President Vladimir V. Putin of

Russia. They had just finalized a statement declaring their vision of a new international order with Moscow and Beijing at its core, untethered from American power.

Over dinner, according to China's [official](#) readout, they discussed "major hot-spot issues of mutual concern."

The details remain secret, but their talks were a crucial moment in the events that culminated 20 days later with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, unleashing Europe's worst war in decades and seismic jolts in global power likely to be felt for decades.

Publicly, Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin had vowed that their countries' friendship had "no limits." The Chinese leader also declared that there would be "no wavering" in their partnership, and he added his weight to Mr. Putin's accusations of Western betrayal in Europe.

Now it appears that Mr. Xi's display of solidarity may have, possibly unwittingly, emboldened Mr. Putin to gamble on going to war to bring Ukraine to heel.

A retracing of Beijing's trail of decisions shows how Mr. Xi's deep investment in a personal bond with Mr. Putin has limited China's options and forced it into policy contortions.

Before and shortly after the invasion, Beijing sounded sympathetic to Moscow's security demands, mocking Western warnings of war and accusing the United States of goading Russia. Over the past two weeks, though, China has sought to edge slightly away from Russia. It has softened its tone, [expressing grief](#) over civilian casualties. It has cast itself as an [impartial party](#), calling for peace talks and for the war to stop as soon as possible.

The quandaries for China, and Mr. Xi, remain.

"He's damned if he did know, and damned if he didn't," [Paul Haenle](#), a former director for China on the National Security Council, said of whether Mr. Xi's had been aware of Russia's plans to invade. "If he did know and he didn't tell people, he's complicit; if he wasn't told by Putin, it's an affront."

A [Western intelligence report concluded](#) that Chinese officials told their Russian counterparts in early February not to invade Ukraine before the end of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, though it was not clear whether Mr. Putin told Mr. Xi directly of any plans. Chinese officials rejected the claim that Beijing had forewarning as "[pure fake news](#)."

In any case, the invasion evidently surprised many in Beijing's establishment, leaving officials scrambling to respond and to evacuate Chinese nationals. Even if Mr. Xi knew anything about Mr. Putin's plan, some experts said, he perhaps expected Moscow to limit its actions to the regions in Ukraine adjoining Russia.

"They did not anticipate a full-scale invasion," said Yun Sun, the director of the China Program at the Stimson Center, who has studied Beijing's [actions in the lead-up to the war](#). "You do not need to invade Ukraine to get what you want. So why bother?" she said, summarizing what she described as a broad view among Chinese officials.

The implications for China extend beyond Ukraine, and even Europe.

Mr. Xi's warm embrace of Mr. Putin only a month ago advertised their ambitions to build what they call a fairer, more stable global order — one in which the United States is a lesser presence. Instead, their summit was followed by the kind of reckless, unilateral military intervention in an independent state that China has long denounced.

Mr. Xi's [statement](#) with Mr. Putin on Feb. 4 endorsed a Russian security proposal that would exclude Ukraine from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. By opposing the expansion of NATO, China

waded into tensions over how far Russia's eastern European neighbors could forge alliances with the West.

"Putin may have done this anyway, but also it was unquestionably an enabling backdrop that was provided by the joint statement, the visit and Xi's association with all of these things," said Andrew Small, a senior fellow with the [German Marshall Fund](#) in Berlin.

The blot on Mr. Xi's image as a statesman has come as he seeks an untroubled march to a Communist Party congress this year, where he is likely to win a groundbreaking third term as party leader.

"He owns that relationship with Putin," Mr. Haenle said. "If you're suggesting in the Chinese system right now that it was not smart to get that close to Russia, you're in effect criticizing the leader."

Mr. Putin's war has already dragged China to a place it did not aim to be. For decades it sought to build ties with Russia while also keeping Ukraine close.

In 1992, China was among the first countries to establish ties with a newly independent Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It turned to Ukraine as a major supplier of corn, sunflower and rapeseed oil, as well as arms technology.

Over the past years, as growing numbers of Ukrainians supported joining NATO, Chinese diplomats did not raise objections with Kyiv, said Sergiy Gerasymchuk, an analyst with Ukrainian Prism, a foreign policy research organization in Kyiv.

Ukraine was "trying to sit on the fence and avoid any sensitive issues with Beijing, and expected the same from China," he said.

As opinion against China hardened in many countries, Mr. Xi became preoccupied with defending his nation against what he saw as threats to its rise, especially from the United States.

Relations were showing no signs of lasting improvement under the Biden administration, so Mr. Xi moved to bolster ties with Mr. Putin to blunt American policies.

The two leaders shared similar world views. Both lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both saw Washington as a prime instigator of any political opposition to their rule. For both leaders, their partnership was an answer to Mr. Biden's effort to forge an "alliance of democracies."

At a video summit in December, Mr. Xi told Mr. Putin that "in its closeness and effectiveness, this relationship even exceeds an alliance," a Kremlin aide [told reporters in Moscow](#) at the time.

Yet Mr. Xi remains a more cautious leader than Mr. Putin, and he appeared hopeful that China would not be forced to choose between Russia and Ukraine.

Only a month before his Olympic summit with Mr. Putin, the Chinese leader hailed 30 years of diplomatic ties with Ukraine. "I attach high importance to developing the Chinese-Ukrainian strategic partnership," Mr. Xi [said in](#) a Jan. 4 message to Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky.

Even so, as Mr. Putin became determined to reverse Ukraine's turn to Western security protections, Chinese officials began to echo Russian arguments. Beijing also saw a growing threat from American-led military blocs.

In late January, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken [called China's foreign minister](#), Wang Yi, to warn him about a war against Ukraine. Mr. Wang, however, urged Mr. Blinken to address Russia's security grievances. Europe needed a new, "balanced" security organization, he said, making clear that NATO did not serve that role.

Beijing had its own complaints with NATO, rooted in the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia, during NATO's war in 1999 to protect a breakaway region, Kosovo. Those suspicions deepened when NATO in 2021 began to describe China as an emerging challenge to the alliance.

As Russian troops massed on Ukraine's borders, Chinese officials kept repeating their defense of Russia's security concerns.

They also scoffed at Western intelligence warnings about Russia's imminent invasion. Washington, not Moscow, was the warmonger, they suggested, pointing to America's invasion of Iraq in 2003. On Feb. 23, a foreign ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, [accused Washington](#) of "manufacturing panic."

The next day, Russian forces struck.

While governments across the world condemned Mr. Putin, Beijing directed its criticism at the United States and its allies. It even avoided calling Mr. Putin's actions an invasion.

In recent days, though, Beijing's language has begun to shift, reflecting a desire to avoid standing too close to Mr. Putin.

Chinese officials tweaked their calls to heed Russia's security, stressing that "any country's legitimate security concerns should be respected." They still did not use the word "invasion," but have acknowledged a "conflict between Ukraine and Russia."

China has also sought to position itself as a potential mediator, though so far only in vague terms. Mr. Wang, the Chinese foreign minister, told reporters on Monday that Beijing was willing to "play a constructive role" in bringing about peace talks.

China's efforts to distance itself from Russia have come too late, said Mr. Gerasymchuk, the analyst in Kyiv. He said China would wait to see who prevailed in the war and seek to improve relations with the winner.

"Many decision makers in China began to perceive relations in black and white: either you are a Chinese ally or an American one," said Mr. Gerasymchuk, who has been spending nights in a bomb shelter. "They still want to remain sort of neutral, but they bitterly failed."

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HEADLINE	03/07 DOH: 1,432,231 cases, 12,076 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article259157048.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported Monday 51 new COVID-19 deaths since Friday.</p> <p>As of Monday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,076. The confirmed death tally as of Feb. 18 was 11,890. The state reported 131 new cases Monday, 698 Sunday and 1,423 cases Saturday.</p> <p>Monday's number was low due to an interruption in data processing on Sunday, DOH said on its website.</p> <p>"We expect to provide a full update in Wednesday's dashboard update," the state said.</p> <p>The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,432,231 cases on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Tacoma sees highest price for gas
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article259146453.html
GIST	<p>The price of gas has been soaring at gas pumps across the U.S. in the last week, and Tacoma is no exception. Unleaded gas was an average of \$4.53 per gallon in the city Monday, a cringe-inducing record that beat out the previous high from June 2008.</p>

Just a week ago, the average in Tacoma was \$4.05 per gallon. A month ago it was \$3.99 per gallon. Those figures are according to AAA, which points to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as the cause of the skyrocketing prices. In the first full week of the invasion, the national average rose by nearly 41 cents, topping \$4.

The previous record in Tacoma for unleaded gas was \$4.367 per gallon in June 2008.

"Forget the \$4 per gallon mark, the nation will soon set new all-time record highs and we could push closer to a national average of \$4.50/gal.," said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy.

On Sunday, the cheapest station in Tacoma was pricing gas at \$3.94 per gallon, and the most expensive station was \$5.11 per gallon, according to GasBuddy. The fuel-price data company surveys 271 stations in Tacoma.

Washington state's average price for unleaded gas was also at a record-high Monday of \$4.449 per gallon, according to AAA. In Seattle, the average was \$4.63 per gallon, and in Olympia, it was \$4.468 per gallon.

"We've never been in this situation before, with this level of uncertainty," De haan said in a news release. "As we lose a major global producer under the weight of deserving bipartisan sanctions for invading a sovereign country, the cost is high. Americans will be feeling the pain of the rise in prices for quite some time, with little good news foreseen."

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HEADLINE	03/07 Average price WA gas hits record high
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattlenews/article/Price-for-a-gallon-of-gas-in-WA-hits-record-high-16984496.php
GIST	<p>The average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas in Washington is the highest it's ever been, according to the American Automobile Association.</p> <p>On Monday, AAA data showed that the average price for a gallon of gas was \$4.449, the highest recorded average price in state history. A month ago, that figure was \$3.955. A year ago, it was \$3.169.</p> <p>Washington isn't alone. Gas prices are skyrocketing across the U.S. as Russia's invasion of Ukraine disrupts the global energy market.</p> <p>The average national price for a gallon of gas on Monday was \$4.06, the highest it's been since July 2008. AAA said that current figure is 45 cents higher than it was a year ago, 62 cents higher than it was a month ago and \$1.30 higher than it was a year ago. Many speculate that prices could creep above the 2008 record of \$4.11 sometime this week.</p> <p>The AAA website has county-by-county breakdown of gas prices in Washington. Generally, refiners sell gasoline to retailers at wholesale prices that differ across geographic areas. Prices tend to be higher in places where there is more demand.</p> <p>Predictably, prices are highest in King County, the state's most populous region. There, a gallon of gas costs \$4.662 on average. Prices are the next highest in Pacific and Snohomish counties, where, on average, a single gallon of gas costs \$4.625 and \$4.561, respectively. Prices are the lowest in Pend Oreille County. There, a gallon of gas costs \$3.824.</p> <p>Gas prices were already rising during the pandemic due in part to fluctuations in supply and demand. But after the U.S. and European Union imposed harsh economic sanctions on Russia — which supplies 10% of the world's oil — many refiners and traders stopped purchasing oil from the country for fear they would violate those sanctions. That has led to a sharp drop in the supply of oil, which drives gas prices up as demand continues to rise.</p>

HEADLINE	03/07 Seattle spring housing market is coming
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/real-estate/seattles-spring-housing-market-is-coming-heres-what-to-expect/
GIST	<p>A cache of new homes hit the market for sale in the Seattle area last month, hinting at the arrival of the spring market when home shopping will heat up.</p> <p>If the last two years are any indication, home shoppers may be bracing for long lines at open houses, aggressive bidding wars and skyrocketing prices. But some expect 2022 to be at least a little cooler in the local housing market.</p> <p>Could the eye-popping growth in prices finally level off? Here's a look at what to expect this year.</p> <p>Are homes finally going to be affordable? Not exactly.</p> <p>The median home price in King County last month, not including condos, was \$857,750, up 10.7% compared to January and 14.4% from a year earlier, according to data released Monday by the Northwest Multiple Listing Service.</p> <p>In Pierce County, the median house sold for \$535,000, up 1.9% compared to January and 15.8% from a year earlier. In Snohomish County, the median home sold for \$745,725, up 4.3% compared to January and 19.5% from a year earlier. In Kitsap County, the median home sold for \$525,000, up 3.2% from January and 21.3% from last year.</p> <p>But rising mortgage rates, high prices and some new housing construction could combine to temper rising prices across the country, predicts Mark Fleming, chief economist for First American Financial Corporation. "What goes up, must eventually moderate," he wrote last month.</p> <p>Zillow, Redfin and Lawrence Yun, chief economist for the National Association of Realtors, have issued similar predictions for 2022. Local brokers agree.</p> <p>"I do expect that we will see a slower rate of growth in terms of pricing," said Jamie Jensen, a John L. Scott broker based in Kingston.</p> <p>"Some buyers are just getting frustrated and getting out of the market for now," Jensen said. "And when you go from last year, getting 15 offers on a property, to this year, getting maybe four to five, that's going to help temper those sold prices."</p> <p>When John Stevens listed his five-bedroom Tudor near Lake City last month, he braced for something like the stories he'd read about the frenzied local housing market: long lines for an open house and lots of offers.</p> <p>"I knew I wanted to take advantage of this pop in the market that wasn't going to last," he said.</p> <p>Instead, when the time came to review offers, the home had received none. Soon, a buyer offered right at the list price, and Stevens took it.</p> <p>"I was anticipating there was going to be a bidding war and when that didn't happen, it was a real letdown," he said. "The person who bought it was very smart. They knew they could possibly be the only offer and I'd likely accept."</p> <p>Even with slower bidding wars, affordability will be a challenge.</p>

Housing costs will likely continue to rise faster than household incomes, Fleming noted. Nationally, the average mortgage payment has climbed along with home prices and now takes up nearly 26% of median household income, translating to “the worst affordability since 2008,” according to data provider Black Knight.

Interest rate hikes are coming

Since the start of the pandemic, low interest rates have drawn more homebuyers and in turn driven up competition and prices. That could begin to slow this year.

The Fed plans to raise mortgage interest rates, making it more expensive to borrow money and, [regulators hope, cooling the housing market](#).

The Mortgage Bankers Association [projects](#) interest rates could hit 4% by the end of this year, up from 3.1% at the same time in 2021.

In the Seattle area, “the competition’s going to be higher on the lower end, because when interest rates rise, buyers can’t afford as much, so they’re forced to look at the lower price point,” said North Seattle Redfin agent Jasen Oda. “The first-time homebuyer range — median-priced homes and below — are going to really be hurting the most in this rising interest rate environment.”

The rapid drive-up in home prices has sparked [fears of another housing bubble](#), though many economists predict the market [won’t crash like it did in 2008](#), in part because of stricter underwriting rules.

More to choose from

The spring arrival of new homes for sale is already offering buyers more to choose from during an ongoing national [housing shortage](#). That uptick usually begins in January and February and lasts through June.

In February, the number of new listings in King County was up 45.5% from January. In Pierce County, new listings were up 39.3%, and in Snohomish County, they were up 36.3%.

In Kitsap County, where new listings are up 21.7%, new construction is helping provide more options for homebuyers who can spend \$500,000 or more, Jensen said, and some homeowners who held off on selling are ready to make a move.

“I’m getting calls from sellers who are like, ‘OK I’m finally ready.’ I think people are starting to feel like we can get past COVID and now they’re feeling more comfortable with having people in their homes,” Jensen said.

Still, demand from homebuyers far outpaces the supply. In February, it would have taken about two weeks to sell through all the available homes for sale in King County, according to a measure known as months of inventory. The listing service considers a “balanced” market to have four to six months of inventory.

“So many buyers came off the holidays, fighting for the trickle of homes that are coming onto the market,” Oda said.

Even with more inventory, Jensen said, “it’s still going to be a seller’s market for the foreseeable future.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 Mask, vaccine rules arts, music events
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/what-you-need-to-know-about-mask-and-vaccine-requirements-to-get-into-arts-and-music-events-this-spring/
GIST	If you’re looking forward to attending in-person arts events this spring, don’t toss your stash of masks just yet. As Washington and King County drop COVID-19 masking and vaccination requirements this month, the response from the Seattle arts community is mixed. While some arts groups and venues are following

the eased guidelines, many performing arts organizations are sticking to requiring masks and vax proof at least through the end of May.

On March 1, King County [ended its requirement](#) that restaurants, bars, gyms and cultural and recreational spaces verify patrons' vaccination or negative coronavirus test status. And Gov. Jay Inslee [announced late last month](#) that the statewide mask mandate would lift March 12, ahead of his initial timeline; King and Snohomish counties are following suit. Businesses, though, are free to impose their own vaccination and masking requirements if they choose.

Here's what a number of arts, music and culture organizations in the Seattle area are doing.

Performing arts

Many local arts and culture organizations, including Seattle Theatre Group, 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Symphony, Seattle Opera, Pacific Northwest Ballet, A Contemporary Theatre, Town Hall and more, have decided to require masks and proof of vaccination or a negative coronavirus test until at least May 31.

"Our hope is to be able to provide the general public here in King County, and certainly in Seattle, a baseline of what they can expect at many of the venues and arts organizations," said Josh LaBelle, executive director of Seattle Theatre Group, which runs the Paramount, Moore and Neptune theaters.

Following a meeting between Seattle-area theater leaders in late February, most, if not all, local theaters are following this same timeline, according to Bernadine Griffin, the 5th Ave's managing director.

Organization leaders say they will continue to regularly reassess their policies, but they remain committed to the safety of patrons, many of whom have requested that these policies stay intact.

While the loosening county and state guidelines is a good sign, said Krishna Thiagarajan, Seattle Symphony's president and CEO, arts organizations have specific factors to consider. The government recommendations, he said, "are made for a very sort of broad common denominator," not a place like the Symphony, where a number of performers are blowing air through their instruments.

And the safety of staff is a factor too. Unmasked performers are typically exposed to thousands of people each week, sometimes in intimate settings like those at Taproot Theatre, said Karen Lund, producing artistic director

Many organizations are seeing increased attendance, but numbers aren't what they used to be, and leaders also aren't convinced the loss of the mask and vax mandates will have a large impact on turnout.

People who have been very cautious the last two years "will stay home until they personally decide it is safe to come back," Ellen Walker, executive director of Pacific Northwest Ballet, said. And people who are feeling OK with returning because of the area's relatively high vaccination rates — "those folks are already back."

The 5th Ave's Griffin acknowledged the potential for disgruntled patrons and said the county lifting restrictions will make it harder on front-of-house staff, though the hope is that consistency across the field will prevent complaints of policies being one way at one theater and another somewhere else.

"We really believe that masking and proof of vaccine is giving people confidence to come back," said Kristina Murti, Seattle Opera's director of marketing and communications.

STG's LaBelle agreed, saying after a difficult two years, "holding on for a bit longer to try to ensure a soft landing feels pretty reasonable."

Concert venues and nightclubs

Though the Paramount, Moore and Neptune theaters — three of the city's most prominent venues for music — are requiring masks and vaccination proof through May, things vary at other venues.

Last Tuesday, a [concert from Latin pop star Bad Bunny](#) at Climate Pledge Arena became Seattle's first major event since vaccination/negative test requirements for large gatherings were lifted. Earlier that day, Climate Pledge Arena's website indicated it would no longer require such proof at concerts and sporting events, though masks would still be required until further guidance from local authorities.

Mask compliance has been inconsistent at concerts throughout the pandemic, and now in the mandate's lame duck period, they were seldom worn during the show.

Among smaller Seattle clubs, "there's no consensus" on how to proceed, said Steven Severin, an organizer with the Washington Nightlife Music Association, a coalition of independently owned venues [formed at the onset of the pandemic](#). He expects some venues to extend their vaccination and/or mask policies, while others follow state and county guidelines.

"It's super encouraging, though, to know that it looks like everything is headed in the right direction," Severin said. "Hopefully it continues this way and we can get back to having fun without worrying about if we are going to pay some kind of a price or not."

Museums

Seattle Art Museum, following local government guidelines, no longer requires proof of vaccination or negative test to enter the museum, and on March 12, will no longer require masks.

Similarly, Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, following King County and UW guidelines, is no longer requiring proof of vaccination. Masks will still be required through March 18, following UW guidelines, and the museum is currently considering next steps.

JeeSook Kutz, Henry's director of finance and administration, noted it's too early to tell how visitors will react to the most recent changes, but said the gallery has received an overwhelmingly positive response to safety protocols so far. The hope is that, between offering often large, lofty gallery spaces and the easing of restrictions, more people will be encouraged to return to in-person museum experiences.

Meanwhile, the Frye Art Museum will maintain its mask requirement, even after the King County requirement is lifted. Proof of vaccination or a recent negative test is no longer required, though visitors are encouraged to be vaccinated, according to Ingrid Langston, Frye spokesperson. These decisions came after organization leadership sought feedback from front-line staff, including the security union.

Movie theaters

Chain multiplexes will follow state/county guidelines, as they have throughout the pandemic, meaning masks will be optional starting March 12. The local chain Far Away Entertainment, which owns the Admiral, Varsity and other theaters, plans to follow suit.

But many indie theaters will stick with masking for the near future, including SIFF's three cinemas: the Uptown, Egyptian and Film Center. The Grand Illusion in the University District, Ark Lodge Cinemas in Columbia City and Northwest Film Forum on Capitol Hill will also continue to require masking; the latter two will also continue to check vaccination status. All will be reassessing as they monitor pandemic conditions over the spring.

Ark Lodge co-owner Justin Pritchett said his business is planning to keep the mask requirement for a while because, while outdoor masking seems to have waned, "it seems indoors there is still hesitancy."

Bookstores

Local bookstores, which are both retail outlets (meaning they weren't required to ask for vaccination proof) and arts venues offering readings and other events, have no consensus as the mandates lift — some will continue to require masks, some will require them if the store reaches a certain capacity, and some will follow the state/county guidelines. In short: If you're planning to visit a bookstore, bring a mask just in case.

	<p>Elliott Bay Book Co. expects to no longer require masks after March 12, general manager Tracy Taylor said in an email, and the staff hopes to slowly begin resuming in-store readings and events in April.</p> <p>But Dan Ullom, owner of Brick & Mortar Books in Redmond, no doubt spoke for many when he said his store was still deciding what to do, and either decision — masks or no masks — was going to be problematic for some customers.</p> <p>“We are leaning on keeping masks in place, though if we do, we need to decide on the criteria for when we are going to go without masks again,” he wrote in an email. When the mandate lifts on March 12, “we are going to be having a lot of conversations, no matter what decision we make.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Adversaries note Russia military stumbles
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/us/politics/russia-ukraine-military.html
GIST	<p>CONSTANTA, Romania — When it comes to war, generals say that “mass matters.”</p> <p>But nearly two weeks into President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine — Europe’s largest land war since 1945 — the image of a Russian military as one that other countries should fear, let alone emulate, has been shattered.</p> <p>Ukraine’s military, which is dwarfed by the Russian force in most ways, has somehow managed to stymie its opponent. Ukrainian soldiers have killed more than 3,000 Russian troops, according to conservative estimates by U.S. officials.</p> <p>Ukraine has shot down military transport planes carrying Russian paratroopers, downed helicopters and blown holes in Russia’s convoys using American anti-tank missiles and armed drones supplied by Turkey, these officials said, citing confidential U.S. intelligence assessments.</p> <p>Russian soldiers have been plagued by poor morale as well as fuel and food shortages. Some troops have crossed the border with MREs (meals ready to eat) that expired in 2002, U.S. and other Western officials said, and others have surrendered and sabotaged their own vehicles to avoid fighting.</p> <p>To be sure, most military experts say that Russia will eventually subdue Ukraine’s army. Russia’s military, at 900,000 active duty troops and 2 million reservists, is eight times the size of Ukraine’s. Russia has advanced fighter planes, a formidable navy and marines capable of multiple amphibious landings, as they proved early in the invasion when they launched from the Black Sea and headed toward the city of Mariupol.</p> <p>And Western governments that have spoken openly about Russia’s military failings are eager to spread the word to help damage Russian morale and bolster the Ukrainians.</p> <p>But with each day that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy holds out, the scenes of a frustrated Russia pounding, but not managing to finish off, a smaller opponent dominate screens around the world.</p> <p>The result: Militaries in Europe that once feared Russia say they are not as intimidated by Russian ground forces as they were in the past.</p> <p>That Russia has so quickly abandoned surgical strikes, instead killing civilians trying to flee, could damage Putin’s chances of winning a long-term war in Ukraine. The brutal tactics may eventually overwhelm Ukraine’s defenses, but they will almost certainly fuel a bloody insurgency that could bog down Russia for years, military analysts say. Most of all, Russia has exposed to its European neighbors and American rivals gaps in its military strategy that can be exploited in future battles.</p>

“Today what I have seen is that even this huge army or military is not so huge,” said Lt. Gen. Martin Herem, Estonia’s chief of defense, during a news conference at an air base in northern Estonia with Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Herem’s colleague and the air force chief, Brig. Gen. Rauno Sirk, in an interview with a local newspaper, was even more blunt in his assessment of the Russian air force. “If you look at what’s on the other side, you’ll see that there isn’t really an opponent anymore,” he said.

Many of the more than 150,000 largely conscripted troops that Moscow has deployed across Ukraine have been bogged down north of Kyiv, the capital. The northeastern city of Kharkiv was expected to fall within hours of the invasion; it is battered by an onslaught of rocket fire and shelling, but still standing.

Every day, Pentagon officials caution that Russia’s military will soon correct its mistakes, perhaps shutting off communications across the country, cutting off Zelenskyy from his commanders. Or Russia could try to shut down Ukraine’s banking system, or parts of the power grid, to increase pressure on the civilian population to capitulate.

Even if they don’t, the officials say a frustrated Putin has the firepower to simply reduce Ukraine to rubble — although he would be destroying the very prize he wants. The use of that kind of force would expose not only the miscalculations the Kremlin made in launching a complex, three-sided invasion but also the limits of Russia’s military upgrades.

“The Kremlin spent the last 20 years trying to modernize its military,” said Andrei V. Kozyrev, the foreign minister for Russia under Boris Yeltsin, in a post on Twitter. “Much of that budget was stolen and spent on mega-yachts in Cyprus. But as a military advisor you cannot report that to the President. So they reported lies to him instead. Potemkin military.”

During a trip through the Eastern European countries that fear they could next face Putin’s military, Milley has consistently been asked the same questions. Why have the Russians performed so poorly in the early days of the war? Why did they so badly misjudge the Ukrainian resistance?

His careful response, before reporters in Estonia: “We’ve seen a large, combined-arms, multi-axis invasion of the second-largest country in Europe, Ukraine, by Russian air, ground, special forces, intelligence forces,” he said, before describing some of the bombardment brought by Russia and his concern over its “indiscriminate firing” on civilians.

“It’s a little bit early to draw any definitive lessons learned,” he added. “But one of the lessons that’s clearly evident is that the will of the people, the will of the Ukrainian people, and the importance of national leadership and the fighting skills of the Ukrainian army has come through loud and clear.”

While the Russian army’s troubles are real, the public’s view of the fight is skewed by the realities of the information battlefield. Russia remains keen to play down the war and provides little information about its victories or defeats, contributing to an incomplete picture.

But a dissection of the Russian military’s performance so far, compiled from interviews with two dozen U.S., NATO and Ukrainian officials, paints a portrait of young, inexperienced conscripted soldiers who have not been empowered to make on-the-spot decisions, and a noncommissioned officer corps that isn’t allowed to make decisions either. Russia’s military leadership, with Gen. Valery Gerasimov at the top, is far too centralized; lieutenants must ask him for permission even on small matters, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss operational matters.

In addition, the Russian senior officers have proved so far to be risk-averse, the officials said.

Their caution partly explains why they still don’t have air superiority over all of Ukraine, for example, U.S. officials said. Faced with bad weather in northern Ukraine, Russian officers grounded some Russian

attack planes and helicopters, and forced others to fly at lower altitudes, making them more vulnerable to Ukrainian ground fire, a senior Pentagon official said.

“Most Russian capabilities have been sitting on the sidelines,” said Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CNA, a defense research institute, in an email. “The force employment is completely irrational, preparations for a real war near nonexistent and morale incredibly low because troops were clearly not told they would be sent into this fight.”

Russian tank units, for instance, have deployed with too few soldiers to fire and protect the tanks, officials said. The result is that Ukraine, using Javelin anti-tank missiles, has stalled the convoy headed for Kyiv by blowing up tank after tank.

Thomas Bullock, an open source analyst from Janes, the defense intelligence firm, said Russian forces have made tactical errors that the Ukrainians have been able to capitalize on.

“It looks like the Ukrainians have been most successful when ambushing Russian troops,” Bullock said. “The way the Russians have advanced, which is that they have stuck to main roads so that they can move quickly, not risk of getting bogged down in mud. But they are advancing on winding roads and their flanks and supply routes are overly exposed to Ukrainian attacks.”

Russian battlefield defeats, and mounting casualties, also have an effect.

“Having the Ukrainians just wreck your airborne units, elite Russian units, has to be devastating for Russian morale,” said Frederick W. Kagan, an expert on the Russian military who leads the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute. “Russian soldiers have to be looking at this and saying, ‘What the hell have we gotten ourselves into?’”

Most of Russia’s initial attacks in Ukraine were relatively small, involving at most two or three battalions. Such attacks demonstrate a failure to coordinate disparate units on the battlefield and failed to take advantage of the full power of the Russian force, Kagan said.

Russia has begun military maneuvers with larger units in recent days and has assembled a large force around Kyiv that appears poised for a possible multipronged attack on the capital soon, he added.

Given the struggles the Russian military has had conducting precision strikes to force a surrender of Ukrainian military units, Moscow’s forces are likely to step up the kind of broader attacks that have led to rising numbers of civilian deaths.

But in the end, military officials say they still expect that mass will matter.

“The Russian advance is ponderous,” retired Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, a former NATO supreme allied commander for Europe, said at a virtual Atlantic Conference event on the crisis last Friday. “But it is relentless, and there’s still a lot of force to be applied.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 Boeing halts Russia titanium; not Airbus
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-07/boeing-halts-russian-titanium-purchases-as-airbus-keeps-buying
GIST	<p>Boeing has halted titanium purchases from Russia while rival Airbus continues to source from the country, highlighting the uncertain path for aerospace manufacturers following the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Boeing said it doesn’t anticipate a major disruption to aircraft output in the near term, after an initiative in recent years to diversify its metal sourcing arrangements. The decision to stop purchases comes after the U.S. planemaker said last week that it would suspend major operations in Moscow.</p>

“Our inventory and diversity of titanium sources provide sufficient supply for airplane production, and we will continue to take the right steps to ensure long-term continuity,” Boeing said Monday in an emailed statement.

Aerospace companies have been bracing for the fallout on titanium supplies from Russia’s attack on Ukraine, in part because of financial sanctions that make payments to Russian firms difficult. Russia’s VSMPO-Avisma Corp. supplies nearly a quarter of global titanium, and Boeing announced a new deal with the company in November.

Boeing, which has been stockpiling the metal in recent months, gets about a third of its titanium from Russia, the Wall Street Journal reported earlier. The company’s chief executive officer, Dave Calhoun, said during the company’s January earnings call that Boeing is “protected for quite a while, but not forever.”

Airbus, which has also suspended operations in Moscow and stopped providing parts and maintenance to Russian customers, said it is sourcing titanium from Russia and other countries. The purchases are made in accordance with all sanctions and applicable export control regulations, the European firm said via email.

Besides Boeing, aerospace firms including Safran and Dassault Aviation are looking for alternative supplies of titanium, which is used in airplane parts from engines to fasteners.

“It’s a big concern for us,” Dassault CEO Eric Trappier told reporters at an earnings press conference last week, but without providing details on available inventories of the metal. “We are trying to find alternatives, which exist, to cope with this new situation.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 Capitol officers ‘hesitant’ to use force Jan 6
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/capitol-police-january-6-use-of-force-report/
GIST	<p>A survey of 315 Capitol Police officers found law enforcement "felt discouraged or hesitant to use force" on January 6 as the U.S. Capitol was overrun by a mob intent on overturning the 2020 presidential election. The 115-page report issued by the Government Accountability Office nearly 14 months after the Capitol insurrection has urged U.S. Capitol Police to offer additional crowd-control training, as well as pre-operational guidance to officers on the ground.</p> <p>In total,190 respondents expressed concerns or made suggestions related to information sharing, with one offering that "had any information on the morning of the 6th aside from 'prepare for a long day' they would have had a different mindset when the group approached."</p> <p>More than half of the officers surveyed said that guidance and intelligence shared before and during the attack was "not at all clear" or "not provided."</p> <p>According to the report, approximately 150 officers recalled 293 use-of-force incidents, with open-hand pushing ranking as the most prominent technique employed (91 incidents), followed by batons (83 incidents) and withdrawing a firearm from its holster (37 incidents.) In 17 cases, officers reported pointing a firearm at an individual, though only one officer opened fire.</p> <p>Over half of respondents said more instruction was needed, with dozens of officers requesting more courses on "very large or violent crowd control" as well as "more realistic training."</p> <p>The Government Accountability Office (GAO), a congressional watchdog, found that following the seven-hour onslaught, about 114 U.S. Capitol Police officers reported injuries. The insurrection caused \$1.5 million in damages to the U.S. Capitol building.</p> <p>Roughly a quarter of those surveyed were "discouraged or hesitant to use force because of a fear of disciplinary actions." Several respondents noted they did not feel empowered to make decisions on use of force without approval by supervisors and conceded that "optics were affecting security decisions."</p>

"I saw too many instances where officers were questioning whether they could use force because they were afraid of getting in trouble," noted one officer in the survey. "If ever there was a time when force is appropriate, a mob violently forcing their way into the Capitol would be it." Still, several respondents also said they felt that the department would not back them, "even when force was used under justifiable circumstances," according to the audit.

The GAO determined that the department's discussions with officers following the attack is a "positive step," but deemed misconceptions related to use of force were "persistent both before and after the attack."

"The events of January 6, 2021 raised important questions about whether the Capitol Police is adequately prepared to respond effectively and efficiently in the current threat environment," the report concluded. While investigators found Capitol Police have taken "some positive first steps," the agency "needs to better understand and address potential officer hesitancy to use force, concerns with the department, and morale."

Last month, the GAO concluded that the Capitol Police's "process for assessing and mitigating physical security risks to the Capitol complex is not comprehensive or documented." In a separate report issued a year after the attack on the U.S. Capitol, Congress' investigative arm determined that the U.S. Capitol Police Board, "is not fulfilling its responsibility in overseeing the Capitol Police's protection of Congress and the Capitol Building."

In a statement shared with CBS News Monday, U.S. Capitol Police said that the department "agree[s] with the recommendations, which we have already addressed."

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HEADLINE	03/07 Bird flu Iowa commercial turkey flock
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/bird-flu-confirmed-northwest-iowa-commercial-turkey-flock-83304716
GIST	<p>DES MOINES, Iowa -- Officials announced Monday that they have identified bird flu in a commercial flock of 50,000 turkeys in northwest Iowa, the state's second case of a virus that has been identified in multiple U.S. states.</p> <p>Iowa agriculture officials and the U.S. Department of Agriculture confirmed the case in Buena Vista County, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of the case identified March 1 in a backyard flock of 42 ducks and chickens in Pottawattamie County.</p> <p>Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a disaster proclamation for Buena Vista County to allow state resources to help with disposal of the affected flock and disinfection of the farm. Officials didn't immediately disclose the number of birds involved. The emergency declaration also provides resources for tracking, monitoring and the rapid detection of bird flu.</p> <p>The turkeys have been killed and disposed of on the farm. A 10-kilometer (6.2-mile) control area has been established to limit traffic in and out of the area while extensive testing is done to ensure no other cases, said State Veterinarian Dr. Jeff Kaisand. He said five other commercial farms are within the zone and 37 backyard flocks.</p> <p>The discovery of avian influenza is especially troubling in Iowa, the nation's leading egg producer. In 2015, an outbreak led producers to kill 33 million hens in the state and 9 million birds in Minnesota, the nation's leading turkey producer. Smaller outbreaks were reported in Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin.</p> <p>Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig said in a statement that state and federal agriculture officials are working with producers "to trace back, control and eradicate this disease from our state."</p>

Naig told reporters that if the virus spreads significantly into commercial egg, chicken or turkey populations, then consumer prices and product availability could become an issue. Cases have been reported in at least 12 states in backyard flocks and commercial production houses.

“We're not seeing a massive outbreak on a large scale and so I think it's too soon to be concerned about food impact or pricing impact at this point, but you have to acknowledge that can be an issue over time,” he said.

Avian influenza is an airborne respiratory virus that spreads easily among chickens through nasal and eye secretions, as well as manure. The virus can spread from flock to flock by wild birds, through contact with infected poultry, by equipment, and on the clothing and shoes of caretakers.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the recent bird flu detections do not present an immediate public health concern. No human cases of these avian influenza viruses have been detected in the United States. While it can be transmitted to humans, it is unusual and typically due to close contact with infected birds.

The first infection this year was identified in a commercial flock of turkeys in Indiana on Feb. 9. Since then, five additional flocks have been found with cases in Indiana, where more than 171,000 birds have been killed and removed. The virus also was detected in a flocks of turkeys and broiler chickens in Kentucky last month, resulting in the destruction and disposal of more than 284,000 birds. A commercial chicken flock in Delaware also was infected, leading to the disposal of 1.2 million birds, the USDA said.

In the past few days officials have identified the virus on a southeast Missouri farm with 240,000 broiler chickens, a commercial mixed species flock in southeastern South Dakota and an egg-laying hen operation in northeast Maryland.

On Monday, Nebraska officials confirmed the state's first known discovery of the virus this year, in a wild goose near Holmes Lake in Lincoln.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Half US adults to harmful lead levels as kids
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/half-us-adults-exposed-harmful-lead-levels-kids-83304539
GIST	<p>Over 170 million U.S.-born people who were adults in 2015 were exposed to harmful levels of lead as children, a new study estimates.</p> <p>Researchers used blood-lead level, census and leaded gasoline consumption data to examine how widespread early childhood lead exposure was in the country between 1940 and 2015.</p> <p>In a paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on Monday, they estimated that half the U.S. adult population in 2015 had been exposed to lead levels surpassing five micrograms per deciliter — the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention threshold for harmful lead exposure at the time.</p> <p>The scientists from Florida State University and Duke University also found that 90% of children born in the U.S. between 1950 and 1981 had blood-lead levels higher than the CDC threshold. And the researchers found significant impact on cognitive development: on average, early childhood exposure to lead resulted in a 2.6-point drop in IQ.</p> <p>The researchers only examined lead exposure caused by leaded gasoline, the dominant form of exposure from the 1940s to the late 1980s, according to data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Leaded gasoline for on-road vehicles was phased out starting in the 1970s, then finally banned in 1996.</p> <p>Study lead author Michael McFarland, an associate professor of sociology at Florida State University, said the findings were “infuriating” because it was long known that lead exposure was harmful, based on anecdotal evidence of lead's health impacts throughout history.</p>

Though the U.S. has implemented tougher regulations to protect Americans from lead poisoning in recent decades, the public health impacts of exposure could last for several decades, experts told the Associated Press.

“Childhood lead exposure is not just here and now. It's going to impact your lifelong health,” said Abheet Solomon, a senior program manager at the United Nations Children’s Fund.

Early childhood lead exposure is known to have many impacts on cognitive development, but it also increases risk for developing hypertension and heart disease, experts said.

“I think the connection to IQ is larger than we thought and it's startlingly large,” said Ted Schwaba, a researcher at University of Texas-Austin who studies personality psychology and was not part of the new study.

Schwaba said the study's use of an average to represent the cognitive impacts of lead exposure could result in an overestimation of impacts on some people and underestimation in others.

Previous research on the relationship between lead exposure and IQ found a similar impact, though over a shorter study period.

Bruce Lanphear, a health sciences professor at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver who has researched lead exposure and IQ, said his 2005 study found the initial exposure to lead was the most harmful when it comes to loss of cognitive ability as measured by IQ.

“The more tragic part is that we keep making the same ... mistakes again,” Lanphear said. “First it was lead, then it was air pollution. ... Now it's PFAS chemicals and phthalates (chemicals used to make plastics more durable). And it keeps going on and on.

“And we can’t stop long enough to ask ourselves should we be regulating chemicals differently,” he said.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Limited cease-fire; civilians safely flee?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-ukraine-war-russias-war-ukraine-83291742
GIST	<p>Russian officials said they planned to carry out a limited cease-fire on Tuesday to allow civilians to safely flee besieged Ukrainian cities — something Ukrainian officials said they would believe only after safe evacuations begin, after two earlier attempts at cease-fires failed.</p> <p>The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine grew Monday amid intensified shelling by Russian forces. Food, water, heat and medicine grew increasingly scarce in some areas, including the port city of Mariupol. Russian and Ukrainian delegations held a third round of talks, and a top Ukrainian official said minor, unspecified progress was made toward establishing safe corridors for civilians to escape.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged his people to keep resisting the assault, which U.N. officials say has forced more than 1.7 million people from Ukraine. Zelenskyy also called for a global boycott of all Russian products, including oil.</p> <p>Here’s a look at key things to know about the war:</p> <p>HAS THERE BEEN PROGRESS ON SAFE EVACUATIONS?</p> <p>Weekend attempts to establish safe passages failed amid continued shelling — with each side blaming the other. On Monday, a top Russian official said civilians would be allowed to leave Mariupol, Sumy and the nation's capital of Kyiv, but the proposed evacuation routes would have led mostly to Russia and its ally Belarus, which Ukraine rejected.</p>

Later, Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the U.N. Security Council that Russia would carry out a cease-fire Tuesday morning, and he appeared to suggest that humanitarian corridors from Mariupol, Sumy, Kyiv and Chernigov could give people options on where to go.

The U.N. humanitarian chief, Undersecretary-General Martin Griffiths, urged safe passage for people to go "in the direction they choose."

Zelenskyy's office said those plans can be believed only if a safe evacuation begins.

Russia and Ukraine foreign ministers are scheduled to meet for a fourth round of talks Thursday in Turkey.

WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND?

Ukrainian officials said Russian forces bombed cities in eastern and central Ukraine, and stepped up shelling of suburbs of Kyiv.

"We can't even gather up the bodies because the shelling from heavy weapons doesn't stop day or night," said Anatol Fedoruk, the mayor of Bucha, a Kyiv suburb. "Dogs are pulling apart the bodies on the city streets. It's a nightmare."

In Kyiv, soldiers and volunteers have built hundreds of checkpoints to protect the city of nearly 4 million, often using sandbags, stacked tires and spiked cables.

"Every house, every street, every checkpoint, we will fight to the death if necessary," said Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

Mykolaiv in the south and Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, were also shelled. Video footage from Mykolaiv showed the interior of an apartment building that was hit — there were gaping holes where exterior windows were blown out; an older woman, her arm trembling, sat in a hallway as blood streamed down her face.

Ukrainian officials said Russian forces carried out airstrikes after dark Monday on oil depots in Zhytomyr and Cherniakhiv, two towns west of Kyiv. Officials said the strikes blew up 26 oil tanks and nearby residents were being evacuated.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's foreign minister said more than 20,000 people from 52 countries have volunteered to fight in Ukraine's new international legion.

WHAT HAS BEEN DIRECTLY WITNESSED OR CONFIRMED BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS?

In Mariupol, the situation has become increasingly desperate, with shortages of food, water, and power, and some looting that police have ignored. There is no mobile phone service, so accurate news has become a valuable commodity and rumors abound.

Even hospitals have shortages of antibiotics and painkillers, and doctors have been performing some emergency procedures without them.

Police were advising people to remain in shelters until they hear official messages broadcast over loudspeakers telling them to evacuate.

In the northern city of Kharkiv, Dmitry Sedorenko described the desperate scramble after his apartment block was struck Monday amid heavy shelling.

“I think it struck the fourth floor under us,” Sedorenko said. “Immediately, everything started burning and falling apart. It became smoky and difficult to see and then the floor fell through. We crawled out of the third floor. There were dead people. We got lucky.”

In Kyiv, the central train station remained crowded with people desperate to leave, and frequent shelling could be heard from the city's center. Elsewhere in the city, volunteers chopped peppers and boiled potatoes at a field kitchen at a makeshift camp.

WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS?

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Lithuania and Latvia on Monday to calm any fears that they and Estonia, which he'll visit Tuesday, have about their security. The three Baltic countries, which endured decades of Soviet occupation before regaining their independence in 1991, are members of the EU and NATO.

Blinken stressed that the U.S. commitment to NATO's mutual defense pact is “sacrosanct” and that NATO and the U.S. were discussing stationing troops in the Baltics permanently.

French President Emmanuel Macron, one of the few world leaders who has kept an open line of communication with Putin, criticized Moscow's offer to allow besieged Ukrainians safe passage into Russia and Belarus. “This is cynicism” that is “unbearable,” he told French news broadcaster LCI.

Meanwhile, Russian lawyers snubbed a hearing at the United Nations' top court about Ukraine's effort to halt the invasion.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED?

The death toll of the conflict has been difficult to measure. The U.N. human rights office confirmed 406 civilians had been killed and 801 wounded, but said the real figures are likely higher.

The World Health Organization said it verified at least six attacks that have killed six health care workers and injured 11 others.

Ukrainian refugees continue to pour into neighboring countries, including Poland, Romania and Moldova. Among them are an unknown number of people with U.S. citizenship, though some haven't been able to flee Ukraine yet.

IS RUSSIA FACING MORE SANCTIONS?

A growing number of multinational businesses have cut Russia off from vital financial services, technology and a variety of consumer products in response to Western economic sanctions and global outrage over the war.

Japanese automaker Nissan was the latest to say it is planning to halt production at its Russia plant.

More countries were also issuing sanctions. On Tuesday, the Australian government said it was placing sanctions on Moscow's “propagandists and purveyors of disinformation” who legitimize Russia's invasion as the “de-Nazification” of Ukraine. Foreign Minister Marise Payne said in a statement that Australia was sanctioning 10 “people of strategic interest to Russia” for their role in encouraging hostility toward Ukraine.

The New Zealand government also said it plans to fast track legislation that will allow it to impose economic sanctions against Russia.

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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explainer-humanitarian-corridors-syria-ukraine-83305362
GIST	<p>BEIRUT -- As more Ukrainian towns and cities come under siege, concern is mounting for millions of civilians in the crossfire.</p> <p>Russia has announced the establishment of safe corridors to allow civilians to leave, but there appeared to be few takers. Evacuation routes led mostly to Russia and its ally Belarus, drawing withering criticism from Ukraine and others. And Russia continued to pound some cities with rockets even after the announcement of corridors.</p> <p>Such tactics were common during the Syria war after Moscow entered the war in 2015 to shore up President Bashar Assad's forces.</p> <p>WHAT ARE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS?</p> <p>Humanitarian corridors arise when a population is caught in a war zone, particularly when a city or town is under siege. The idea is that hostilities are halted for a certain time to allow civilians who need to flee to do so along designated routes or to allow urgent humanitarian aid to enter for civilians who remain.</p> <p>The term was first evoked during the Bosnian War in the 1990s, when the U.N. set up "safe areas" for civilians. But the attempt was seen as a failure since the U.N. was unable to protect the zones when they came under attack.</p> <p>Humanitarian corridors also have been sought in the war in Ethiopia, where millions of people in the Tigray region have been under a government blockade for months.</p> <p>HOW WERE THEY USED IN SYRIA?</p> <p>During the Syrian civil war, the Russian and Syrian militaries pursued a strategy of systematically besieging opposition-held cities, towns and districts, sometimes for months or even years. The sieges rained destruction on the populations, with airstrikes, artillery and rockets blasting residential districts, hospitals and infrastructure.</p> <p>Eventually in each case, the Russians and Syrians would offer humanitarian corridors, telling civilians and even some fighters they could leave. Most would then be funneled into the northwest province of Idlib, which remains to this day the last opposition-held enclave in Syria.</p> <p>Humanitarian corridors were created for besieged districts around Damascus and parts of the cities of Homs and Hama. The largest and most famous was for eastern Aleppo in late 2016, capping four years of devastating siege.</p> <p>WERE THEY SAFE?</p> <p>Russian and Syrian forces were often accused of breaking the cease-fires surrounding humanitarian corridors with continued bombing of the besieged cities.</p> <p>"When they talked about these humanitarian corridors or ceasefires, we never believed them. How can you trust someone to stop who is bombing you all the time?" said Afraa Hashem, a 40-year-old activist who survived the Aleppo siege and now resides in London.</p> <p>She recalled how during a humanitarian corridor ceasefire on December 14, 2016, the house where she was sheltering with her family was hit by incendiary bombs.</p> <p>There were also cases of civilians or fighters being detained by Syrian forces as they tried to use humanitarian corridors despite promises of safe passage. In some cases, opposition fighters reportedly opened fire on corridors, either to prevent people from leaving or to spark clashes.</p>

Still, tens of thousands of people used the corridors to get out of the combat zones. They make up the bulk of the 3 million people crowded into Idlib province, which is surrounded by Syrian forces and is still hit by Russian airstrikes.

“After four years under bombs, they forced us to leave, that’s what it is” said Hashem. “They didn’t save us. They put us in another area of bombs, Idlib.”

SO WERE THE CORRIDORS EFFECTIVE?

Ultimately, they were effective in attaining the goals of Russia and the Syrian government: To regain control of opposition areas.

Critics say Russia and Damascus benefited another way as well by carrying out mass demographic change, removing large opposition populations, many of whom have not been able to return to their homes.

Human rights groups and humanitarian agencies point out that under international law, every effort should be made to ensure civilians’ safety no matter where they are.

The tactic of siege-plus-humanitarian corridor, they say, essentially gives residents a brutal choice between fleeing into the arms of their attackers or dying under bombardment.

They said the offer also gives an illusion of legitimacy to the mass slaughter of civilians who remain behind once the siege resumes in full force.

“It is not like Russia can create a humanitarian corridor for two days and then say, ‘Well, we’ve done our job, now we can destroy everything,’” said Sara Kayyali, Syria researcher for Human Rights Watch.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Ukraine: Russia ‘medieval-style’ tactics
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-evacuations-stall-amid-russian-shelling-83291377
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine -- The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine deepened Monday as Russian forces intensified their shelling and food, water, heat and medicine grew increasingly scarce, in what the country condemned as a medieval-style siege by Moscow to batter it into submission.</p> <p>A third round of talks between the two sides ended with a top Ukrainian official saying there had been minor, unspecified progress toward establishing safe corridors that would allow civilians to escape the fighting. Russia’s chief negotiator said he expects those corridors to start operating Tuesday.</p> <p>But that remained to be seen, given the failure of previous attempts to lead civilians to safety amid the biggest ground war in Europe since World War II.</p> <p>Well into the second week of the invasion, with Russian troops making significant advances in southern Ukraine but stalled in some other regions, a top U.S. official said multiple countries were discussing whether to provide the warplanes that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been pleading for.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin’s forces continued to pummel cities with rockets, and fierce fighting raged in places. In the face of the bombardments, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces were showing unprecedented courage.</p> <p>“The problem is that for one soldier of Ukraine, we have 10 Russian soldiers, and for one Ukrainian tank, we have 50 Russian tanks,” Zelenskyy told ABC News in an interview that aired Monday night. He noted that the gap in forces was diminishing and that even if Russian forces “come into all our cities,” they will be met with an insurgency.</p>

In one of the most desperate cities, the encircled southern port of Mariupol, an estimated 200,000 people — nearly half the population of 430,000 — were hoping to flee, and Red Cross officials waited to hear when a corridor would be established.

The city is short on water, food and power, and cellphone networks are down. Stores have been looted as residents search for essential goods.

Police moved through the city, advising people to remain in shelters until they heard official messages broadcast over loudspeakers to evacuate.

Hospitals in Mariupol are facing severe shortages of antibiotics and painkillers, and doctors performed some emergency procedures without them.

The lack of phone service left anxious citizens approaching strangers to ask if they knew relatives living in other parts of the city and whether they were safe.

In the capital, Kyiv, soldiers and volunteers have built hundreds of checkpoints to protect the city of nearly 4 million, often using sandbags, stacked tires and spiked cables. Some barricades looked significant, with heavy concrete slabs and sandbags piled more than two stories high, while others appeared more haphazard, with hundreds of books used to weigh down stacks of tires.

“Every house, every street, every checkpoint, we will fight to the death if necessary,” said Mayor Vitali Klitschko.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, with 1.4 million people, heavy shelling slammed into apartment buildings.

“I think it struck the fourth floor under us,” Dmitry Sedorenko said from his Kharkiv hospital bed. “Immediately, everything started burning and falling apart.” When the floor collapsed beneath him, he crawled out through the third story, past the bodies of some of his neighbors.

Klitschko reported that fierce battles continued in the Kyiv region, notably around Bucha, Hostomel, Vorzel and Irpin.

In the Irpin area, which has been cut off from electricity, water and heat for three days, witnesses saw at least three tanks and said Russian soldiers were seizing houses and cars.

A few miles away, in the small town of Horenka, where shelling reduced one area to ashes and shards of glass, rescuers and residents picked through the ruins as chickens pecked around them.

“What are they doing?” rescue worker Vasyl Oksak asked of the Russian attackers. “There were two little kids and two elderly people living here. Come in and see what they have done.”

In the south, Russian forces also continued their offensive in Mykolaiv, opening fire on the Black Sea shipbuilding center of a half-million people, according to Ukraine's military. Rescuers said they were putting out fires caused by rocket attacks in residential areas.

At The Hague, Netherlands, Ukraine pleaded with the International Court of Justice to order a halt to Russia's invasion, saying Moscow is committing widespread war crimes.

Russia “is resorting to tactics reminiscent of medieval siege warfare, encircling cities, cutting off escape routes and pounding the civilian population with heavy ordnance,” said Jonathan Giblett, a member of Ukraine's legal team.

Russia snubbed the court proceedings, leaving its seats in the Great Hall of Justice empty.

Efforts to set up safe passage for civilians over the weekend fell apart amid continued Russian shelling. Before Monday's talks began, Russia announced a new plan, saying civilians would be allowed to leave Kyiv, Mariupol, Kharkiv and Sumy.

But many of the evacuation routes headed toward Russia or its ally Belarus, which has served as a launch pad for the invasion. Ukraine instead proposed eight routes allowing civilians to travel to western regions of the country where there is no shelling.

Later, Russia's U.N. Ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, told the U.N. Security Council that Russia would carry out a cease-fire Tuesday morning and appeared to suggest that humanitarian corridors leading away from Kyiv, Mariupol, Sumy and Chernigov could give people choice in where they want to go.

The U.N. humanitarian chief, Undersecretary-General Martin Griffiths, addressed the Security Council and urged safe passage for people to go "in the direction they choose."

Zelenskyy's office would not comment on the Russian proposal, saying only that Moscow's plans can be believed only if a safe evacuation begins. The office said Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk planned to make a statement on the issue Tuesday morning.

The battle for Mariupol is crucial because its capture could allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The fighting has sent energy prices surging worldwide and stocks plummeting, and threatens the food supply and livelihoods of people around the globe who rely on crops farmed in the fertile Black Sea region.

The U.N. human rights office reported 406 confirmed civilian deaths but said the real number is much higher. The invasion has also sent 1.7 million people fleeing Ukraine.

On Monday, Moscow again announced a series of demands to stop the invasion, including that Ukraine recognize Crimea as part of Russia and recognize the eastern regions controlled by Moscow-supported separatist fighters as independent. It also insisted that Ukraine change its constitution to guarantee it won't join international bodies like NATO and the EU. Ukraine has already rejected those demands.

Zelenskyy has called for more punitive measures against Russia, including a global boycott of its oil exports, which are key to its economy.

"If (Russia) doesn't want to abide by civilized rules, then they shouldn't receive goods and services from civilization," he said in a video address.

He has also asked for more warplanes. Deputy U.S. Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said officials are "trying to see whether this is possible and doable."

While the West has been rushing weapons to Ukraine such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, some officials fear that sending warplanes could be seen by Moscow as direct involvement in the war.

One possible scenario under discussion: Former Soviet bloc nations that are now NATO members could send Ukraine their own Soviet-era MiGs, which Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly, and the U.S. would then replace those countries' aircraft with American-made F-16s.

Russia's invasion has nearby countries terrified the war could spread to them.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken began a lightning visit to the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, former Soviet republics that are NATO members. Blinken hoped to reassure them of the alliance's protection.

	NATO has shown no interest in sending troops into the country and has rejected Zelenskyy's pleas to establish a no-fly zone for fear of triggering a wider war.
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HEADLINE	03/07 Florida against vaccinating healthy children
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/florida-1st-state-advising-giving-covid-19-vaccine/story?id=83301047
GIST	<p>Despite widespread support for pediatric COVID-19 vaccinations from the nation's top health officials, Florida will become the first state in the country to advise against vaccinating healthy children for COVID-19, the state's Surgeon General, Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo, announced on Monday.</p> <p>"The Florida Department of Health is going to be the first state to officially recommend against the COVID-19 vaccines for healthy children," Ladapo said at the end of a 90-minute roundtable discussion in West Palm Beach, Florida, hosted by Gov. Ron DeSantis, aimed to close the curtain on the "COVID theater once and for all."</p> <p>Just prior to the announcement, Ladapo, alongside a group of physicians, made the case that the COVID-19 vaccines may not be necessary in children.</p> <p>Ladapo pointed to a study released last week out of New York, suggesting that new data showed that Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine protection waned relatively quickly in children between the ages of 5 and 11 years old, as compared to older children.</p> <p>"Already the rates were low. So, we're kind of scraping at the bottom of the barrel particularly with healthy kids, in terms of actually being able to quantify with any accuracy and any confidence, the infinite potential of benefit," Ladapo said Monday.</p> <p>Although the study, which has not been peer-reviewed, suggested immunity waned faster in young children relative to older children, researchers said the vaccine still dramatically reduced the risk of hospitalization.</p> <p>Scientists also said it might be important to study "alternative" vaccine dosing for young children to bolster efficacy.</p> <p>Following the announcement, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that Florida's decision was "absolutely not" a good policy.</p> <p>"Let me just note that we know the science. We know the data and what works and what is the most, what the most effective steps are protecting people of a range of ages from hospitalization and even death," Psaki said during a press briefing on Monday.</p> <p>"It's deeply disturbing that there are politicians peddling conspiracy theories out there and casting doubt on vaccinations, when it is our best tool against the virus and the best tool to prevent even teenagers from being hospitalized," she added.</p> <p>Many health experts across the country have also vehemently pushed back on claims that vaccines may not be necessary for children, urging the importance of vaccines for all eligible children to protect against severe illness.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have also been vocal in their support of pediatric COVID-19 vaccinations, stressing to parents that real-world data has demonstrated that vaccines are safe and effective at protecting children against severe disease, as well as against potential long-term consequences from the virus.</p> <p>"Vaccines are safe and effective in protecting individuals and populations against infectious diseases," physicians from the AAP wrote in a policy statement last month.</p>

	<p>DeSantis also questioned whether children should be getting the shots, touting the state's recent efforts to ban vaccine mandates in schools.</p> <p>"We have this issue in terms of COVID-19 vaccinations with respect to children. And in Florida, we prohibited mandating COVID vaccines for children, so they can go to school and it's a parent's decision," DeSantis said. "A lot of parents have come up to me, and they're just like, 'yeah, thanks for not mandating, we want to make the decision,' but they have mixed feelings about whether they should do that even if it is their choice."</p> <p>Since the onset of the pandemic, more than 12.6 million American children have tested positive for COVID-19, according to data collected by the AAP and Children's Hospital Association. In addition, federal data shows that nationwide, more than 115,000 COVID-19 positive children have been admitted hospitals, while more than 1,500 children have lost their lives to the virus.</p> <p>Alongside the Governor, Ladapo has been vocal about his stance to end COVID-19 mitigation measures in an effort to promote personal freedom.</p> <p>Last month, the duo announced that the state would advise against the use of face coverings to protect against COVID-19.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Ukraine war is deep divide in Middle East
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ukraine-war-highlights-internal-divides-mideast-nations-83312497
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD -- In a neighborhood of Iraq's capital, a gigantic poster of Vladimir Putin with the words, "We support Russia," was up for few hours before a security force arrived and hurriedly took it down. Then came the security directive: All public displays of Putin's pictures shall be banned.</p> <p>In Lebanon, the powerful Hezbollah militia railed against the government's condemnation of Russia's attack on Ukraine, calling for neutrality.</p> <p>Such wrangling shows the deep divisions over the Ukraine war in the Middle East, where Moscow has embedded itself as a key player in recent years, making powerful friends among state and non-state actors while America's influence waned.</p> <p>Political elites closely allied with the West are wary of alienating Russia or the U.S. and Europe. But other forces — from Shiite militia factions in Iraq, to Lebanon's Hezbollah group and Houthi rebels in Yemen — vocally support Russia against Ukraine.</p> <p>These groups are considered to be Iran's boots on the ground in the so-called anti-U.S. "axis of resistance." Putin won their backing largely because of his close ties with Tehran and his military intervention in Syria's civil war in support of President Bashar Assad.</p> <p>They see Putin as a steady, reliable partner who, unlike the Americans, does not drop his allies. In their circles, they even have an affectionate nickname for Putin — "Abu Ali" — which is a common name among Shiite Muslims and meant to portray a certain camaraderie.</p> <p>Meanwhile, governments are walking a tightrope.</p> <p>"Iraq is against the war but has not condemned it nor taken a side," said political analyst Ihsan Alshamary, who heads the Political Thought Think Tank in Baghdad. Iraq needs to remain neutral because it has shared interests with both Russia and the West, he said.</p> <p>He said Iran's allies in the region are outspokenly with Russia "because they are anti-American and anti-West and believe that Russia is their ally."</p>

Russia has invested up to \$14 billion in Iraq and the northern Kurdish-run region, mainly focusing on the energy sector, Moscow's ambassador Elbrus Kutrashev told the Iraqi Kurdish news agency Rudaw in a recent interview.

Among the major oil companies operating in the country are Russia's Lukoil, Gazprom Neft and Rosneft.

Iraq also maintains close ties with the U.S., but Western companies have steadily been plotting to exit from Iraq's oil sector.

Iraq's strongest move so far came after its central bank advised the prime minister against signing new contracts with Russian companies or payments in light of U.S. sanctions. The decision will impact new Russian investment in the country, but little else, Russian industry officials said.

Last week, Iraq was among the 35 countries that abstained from a U.N. General Assembly vote to demand that Russia stop its offensive and withdraw troops from Ukraine. Lebanon voted in favor, while Syria, where Russian ties run deep, voted against. Iran also abstained.

In Lebanon, an unusually blunt Foreign Ministry statement denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused an uproar and upset the Russians, forcing the minister to clarify that Lebanon did not intend to take sides and would remain neutral.

"They distance themselves and claim neutrality where they want, and they interfere and condemn where they want," Hezbollah lawmaker Ibrahim Moussawi wrote on Twitter, taking aim at the Foreign Ministry. "What foreign policy does Lebanon follow, and what is Lebanon's interest in that? Please clarify for us, foreign minister."

Hezbollah, which also sent thousands of fighters to neighboring Syria to shore up Assad's forces, has seized on Russia's invasion of Ukraine to portray it as an inevitable result of U.S. provocations and yet another betrayal by the United States of its allies – in this case, Ukraine.

In Syria, where Russia maintains thousands of troops, billboards proclaiming, "Victory for Russia" popped up in areas of Damascus this week. In opposition-held areas, which still get hit by Russian airstrikes, residents hope pressure will ease on them if Russia gets bogged down in fighting in Ukraine.

In Iraq, the Ukraine war is highlighting divisions in an already fractured landscape during stalled efforts to form a new government, five months after parliament elections were held.

The huge billboard in support of Putin was briefly put up in a Baghdad neighborhood considered a stronghold of powerful Iranian-backed militias. After it was removed, the Russian Embassy in Baghdad tweeted an image of it.

"The poster was provocative, I am against it," said Athir Ghorayeb, who works at a nearby coffee shop. Iraq is only just emerging from decades of war and conflict, he said. "Why do they insist on involving us in new problems?"

Many Iraqis see in Russia's invasion of Ukraine echoes of Saddam Hussein's invasion of neighboring Kuwait and subsequent years-long economic sanctions placed on Iraq. It was only a few days ago that Iraq finished paying reparations to Kuwait which totaled more than \$52 billion.

On social media, Iraqi pages on Facebook with millions of followers have posted news of what is happening in Ukraine, sharing their views. "Our hearts are with the civilians, as those who have tasted war know its catastrophes," posted one user, Zahra Obaidi.

"We have tents for refugees and internally displaced people, so you're welcome to come use them," Hafidh Salih posted.

Toby Dodge, a professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, said Iraq's moves — abstaining from the U.N. vote while limiting economic activity — were prudent, managing the short-term risks without taking an ideological stance.

But the longer the war drags on, the harder it will be to maintain this strategy.

“Iraq is deeply divided politically amongst players between pro-Iran and those that are anti-Iran trying to assert autonomy. The Ukraine becomes another performance, another example of where either side can burnish their credentials,” he said.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/07 Darknet drug trafficker pleads guilty
SOURCE	https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdwa/pr/darknet-drug-trafficker-pleads-guilty-conspiracy-and-firearm-charges
GIST	<p>Seattle – 28-year-Old Nicholas Partlow of Issaquah, Washington, pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Seattle to drug and gun charges, announced U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. Partlow admits selling drugs on the darknet more than 400 times as part of a conspiracy with the operators of darknet marketplaces and other drug traffickers. Partlow also admits selling drugs locally and possessing five firearms during and in furtherance of his drug-trafficking activities. After law enforcement searched Partlow's residence in November 2020, he continued selling drugs. U.S. District Judge Richard A. Jones will sentence Partlow on July 1, 2022.</p> <p>According to the plea agreement, over the course of 2020, postal investigators seized multiple parcels mailed by Partlow to his drug customers. Inside the packages, investigators found heroin, fentanyl pills, and other controlled substances. Investigators also covertly ordered heroin, methamphetamine, and other drugs from Partlow through the darknet.</p> <p>In November 2020, law enforcement obtained a search warrant for Partlow's Issaquah residence. That search turned up heroin, methamphetamine, fentanyl, ketamine, GHB, and other drugs; electronic equipment that Partlow used as part of his trafficking operation; and drug proceeds in cash and cryptocurrency.</p> <p>Investigators also seized Partlow's five firearms—including a sawed-off shotgun and a pistol equipped with a silencer.</p> <p>After the November 2020 search, Partlow continued trafficking drugs. He also tried to obtain another gun. In March 2021, police in Bellevue, Washington, arrested Partlow and an associate. Partlow carried narcotics and a notebook containing information about his trafficking activities. A few months later, in September 2021, Partlow crashed a car in Renton, Washington, while carrying narcotics and a taser. At the time, Partlow was wanted on a federal arrest warrant. He has been in federal custody since then.</p> <p>Under the plea agreement, Partlow is forfeiting to the government a range of items, including guns, electronics, cryptocurrency, cash, and seven wristwatches.</p> <p>Partlow pleaded guilty to two felonies: conspiring to distribute controlled substances and possessing firearms in furtherance of that crime. For the conspiracy charge, Partlow faces up to 20 years in prison; for the firearms charge, he faces a mandatory-minimum five-year prison term, which will run consecutive to any sentence imposed on the conspiracy charge. The ultimate sentence will be determined by Judge Jones after considering U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Experts: Conti bounces back from leak
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/ransomware-gang-conti-bounced-back/
GIST	<p>A Twitter account known as ContiLeaks debuted to much fanfare in late February, with people around the globe watching as tens of thousands of leaked chats between members of the Russia-based ransomware gang Conti hit the web.</p> <p>In the days after the leaks, many celebrated what they thought would be a devastating blow to Conti, which a Ukrainian security researcher had apparently punished by leaking the internal chats because the gang threatened to “strike back” at any entities that organized “any war activities against Russia.”</p> <p>But ten days after the leaks began, Conti appears to be thriving.</p> <p>Experts say the notorious ransomware gang has pivoted all too easily, replacing much of the infrastructure that was exposed in the leaks while moving quickly to hit new targets with ransom demands. According to Vitali Kremez, CEO of the cybersecurity firm AdvIntel, by Monday morning Conti had successfully completed two new data breaches at U.S.-based companies.</p> <p>“Conti is back and still operational and will pursue more targets,” Kremez said. “They’re safe and sound.”</p> <p>Kremez and other experts said that in the days after the chats first leaked on Feb. 27, Conti may have been back on its heels, but it was never fully disabled. The gang’s leadership made a significant effort in the early days following the leaks to transition its infrastructure that was exposed in the hacks to new systems, which slowed down ransomware activity initially, experts said. That interregnum has come to an end.</p> <p>Allan Liska, a threat analyst at Recorded Future, said that because so many victims do not disclose ransomware attacks it is hard to know if Conti was totally inactive in the first few days after the leaks, but he said his firm had “definitely noticed a slowdown” in activity from Conti.</p> <p>Liska said nothing was posted to Conti’s extortion sites — where the gang publicizes data belonging to users who don’t pay ransoms — for a few days after the leaks began. However, Liska said Conti doesn’t post daily to the site even in normal circumstances so it is hard to know for sure if the two events are linked.</p> <p>The threat analysis community has been buzzing about Conti’s increasing network activity in the past few days, Liska said. While Liska was unaware of the new data breaches disclosed by Kremez, he said he has heard about a recent increase in “attempted breaches or phishing emails being sent, things like that, that are indicative that they’re [Conti] still trying to gain access.”</p> <p>“The botnet and the command and control activity is starting to tick back up,” Liska said.</p> <p>Much of Conti’s infrastructure was down in the initial days after the chats leaked — at least 25 different servers were exposed in the leaks, according to Liska, and those remain down. But Liska said Conti’s “command and control” server is very large and not all of it has fallen.</p> <p>Liska said he estimates that Conti has between 50 and 100 servers running at any time, making the 25 or so that have been taken down a survivable injury. In recent days, Liska said, Conti has used the same software that powered the old infrastructure and simply moved everything to new Internet Protocol addresses.</p> <p>A history of resilience</p> <p>Many experts said they are unsurprised by Conti’s staying power. As a collective whose members are highly skilled and anonymous even to each other, nothing short of a law enforcement takedown will truly put them out of business, experts said.</p> <p>John Shier, a senior security adviser at the hardware and software security firm Sophos, said that other ransomware collectives have bounced back from seemingly devastating blows.</p>

“Whenever one of these groups gets disrupted, the temptation is to celebrate a little bit, but there’s always going to be that okay, well, what’s next?” Shier said. “Where are they going to pop up next, under what kind of new model potentially are they going to pop up? Because these groups can be fairly resilient.”

Shier said Conti’s bitcoin wallet reportedly had about \$2 billion in it, a figure he called “staggering.” It’s also a figure that compels groups like Conti to rise from the dead. Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow put it bluntly: Ransomware, he said, is “so massively profitable it isn’t going to go away quickly or easily.”

Liska and Shier agreed on one thing that will likely change as a result of the leaks: Cybercriminals may be more careful about taking on as many affiliates as they have in the past to counter security risks. In the affiliate ransomware model, gangs loan their malware to other hackers in exchange for a share of profits.

The Conti chat leaker is known to be a Ukrainian security researcher and not an affiliate, according to Kremez. But seeing the ease with which the Conti chats were leaked, as well as the damage they caused, will doubtlessly cause more gangs to think twice about sharing sensitive information with far-flung affiliates whom they don’t know as well as core gang members, Shier and Liska predicted.

Shier said he was struck by the fact that nearly 70 people participated in one of the Conti chats.

“That’s a lot of people and not all of them were likely to be Russian citizens living in Russia,” Shier said. “If the people who are the principles behind Conti believe in their geopolitical agenda of supporting Russia, and they want to prevent others who don’t share that view within their group from causing harm to the group, I can only see them severing ties with them. They can still be successful without affiliates — they just won’t make as much money.”

Even if Conti sheds affiliates and scales down in response to the leaks, the gang won’t be put out of business until the Russian government pursues criminal charges or allows the U.S. government to do so, experts said.

“The core members that are in Russia, are going to be insulated from any kind of prosecution or anything that comes from outside of Russia,” Shier said. “Nothing will be the end of them until the Russian government allows them to be investigated and prosecuted.”

Shier said it is possible Conti will rebrand under another name, but the group will live another day with the same leadership it has now.

“I don’t see there being any kind of incentive for the Russian government to do anything with them right now,” Shier said.

Just Monday, Shier said, Conti posted four new data dumps for entities which didn’t pay ransoms on their extortion site. There were other data dumps posted on Saturday and Sunday, he said.

Kremez said Conti may lose some members, but they will revamp and come back stronger because they “learn from mistakes.”

Kremez said that in some ways the leaked chats will hurt the effort to snuff out Conti. He said he expects gang members will change aliases so they will be more difficult to track. The gang will update its infrastructure. It will cut affiliates who are deemed too risky.

“They will reemerge more powerful and better than ever and more bulletproof,” Kremez said. “They will adapt, they will improve, some members will relocate. But they [Conti] will definitely not be pushed out of the market.”

HEADLINE	03/07 Understanding how hackers recon
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/03/understanding-how-hackers-recon.html
GIST	<p>Cyber-attacks keep increasing and evolving but, regardless of the degree of complexity used by hackers to gain access, get a foothold, cloak their malware, execute their payload or exfiltrate data, their attack will begin with reconnaissance. They will do their utmost to uncover exposed assets and probe their target's attack surface for gaps that can be used as entry points.</p> <p>So, the first line of defense is to limit the potentially useful information available to a potential attacker as much as possible. As always, the tug of war between operational necessity and security concerns needs to be taken into account, which requires a better understanding of the type of information typically leveraged.</p> <p>What information are hackers looking for during recon?</p> <p>When running recon on an organization, hackers – whether white or black hats - are "casing a joint." To plan their attack, they will try and uncover as much information as possible about:</p> <p>Your infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The types of technologies you use – As there is no flawless technology, learning about those used to build and manage your infrastructure is hackers' first step. They aim to find vulnerabilities to penetrate your infrastructure and shield themselves from detection. Hackers can gain information about your technologies and how they are used through listening to conversations in tech forums. DevOps participating in such discussions should refrain from divulging their real identity or information that might identify the organization. • Your internet-facing servers - servers hold your organization's vital information. Hackers will attempt to find vulnerabilities ranging from unused or unpatched services to open ports. • Any system used as a server on a public network is a target, so system administrators must be extra vigilant in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping all services current • Opting for secure protocols whenever possible • Limiting the type of network per machine to a strict minimum, preferably one per machine • Monitoring all servers for suspicious activity • Your Operating System (OS) – Each OS has its own vulnerabilities. Windows, Linux, Apple, and other OS regularly publish newly uncovered vulnerabilities and patches. This publicly available information is exploited by cyber-attackers once they know what OS you use. • For example, a forum conversation where Joe Blog, your accountant, explains how to use a function on a Windows 8 Excel Spreadsheet tells the hacker that Joe Blog uses Windows and has not updated his OS for ages. • This tidbit encourages the cyber-attacker to dig further as, if an employee with access to your organization's financial information is allowed to work on an endpoint that is rarely, if ever, updated, employees' endpoint security is lax. • Your security maturity – Hackers are humans and, as such, tend to be lazy. A hacker on a recon mission who finds out that you are using an XSPM (Extended Security Posture Management) platform knows that, even if there is an exploitable entry point, escalation will be hampered at every step, and achieving the malicious action will require a superior level of planning. This discourages most potential cyber-attackers. <p>Credentials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email addresses – as the human mind is the hardest software to upgrade and patch, phishing remains the number one penetration vector for hackers. Though some email addresses, such as info, support, sales, etc., must be public, employees' personal email can be leveraged by hackers for generic phishing messages and spear phishing. • Usernames & passwords – Darknet hackers' shopping malls are full of credentials for sale at ridiculously low prices, hence the recommendation to change your password regularly. • For system admin and other users with high privilege access, maintaining stellar password hygiene – and MFA! - is an absolute must as, should their credentials fall into the hands of a hacker, the entire system could be irremediably compromised. <p>Can you spot a hacker recon?</p>

Forewarned is fore-armed, so it might be a clever idea to listen for signs of hostile recon activity. Recon activity can be classified into two categories:

- Active recon: hackers using tools or spyware to peak into your system. This should trigger alerts from properly configured detection tools, informing security information teams that hackers are "casing" them.
- This should prompt launching a security validation exercise to ensure that potential security gaps are adequately monitored and scheduled for priority patching.
- Passive recon: hackers "stalking" you by collecting publicly available information about your infrastructure's technological details or email addresses. This is, in effect, undetectable.

What Does a Hacker do with the information Gathered During Recon?

Cyber-attackers' goals fall under four broad categories:

- Theft – by far the largest category in terms of numbers, attacks aimed at stealing can be subdivided into more categories matching what the theft aim is:
 - Data – data is 21st century's currency, and any data in the right hand can be translated into value. From Credit Card details to users' personal information to generic data such as traveling habits, all data can be misappropriated for commercial, strategic, or even military purposes.
 - Intellectual Property – IP gives an edge to many organizations and businesses. Competitors, for example, have an immediate interest in obtaining that information.
 - Computing resources – the resources used to power your infrastructure are costly, therefore attractive. Today, stolen resources' main usage is crypto mining.
- Extortion – best known as ransomware, ransomware hijacks parts or all the infrastructure, encrypts the data, and requires payment in crypto-currency to decrypt the affected data. Exfiltrating data and threatening to sell them is also part of ransomware threats.
- Information gathering – a stealthy type of attack that might remain undetected for extended periods. Typically, those are commandeered by nation-states, political opponents, or business competitors.
- Destruction / taking over the infrastructure – attacks aimed at overtaking or destroying are typically led by nation-states targeting critical infrastructure, particularly aggressive competitors, or hacktivists.

Given the range of damages that can result from a cyber-attack, making recon as fruitless or daunting as possible for scouting cyber-attackers is a good policy. This explains the current trend toward better [Attack Surface Management](#) (ASM).

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HEADLINE	03/07 PressReader suffers cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/pressreader-suffers-cyber-attack/
GIST	<p>A cyber-attack on the world's largest digital newspaper and magazine distributor left readers around the world unable to access more than 7000 publications.</p> <p>PressReader, headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, and has offices in Dublin, Ireland and Manila, Philippines, began experiencing a network outage affecting its Branded Editions website and apps and its PressReader site on Thursday.</p> <p>The global outage impacted all PressReader's local, regional and international newspapers and magazines online on mobile devices and in print. Users in countries including Australia, Canada, the UK and the US were blocked from accessing titles, including The Guardian, Vogue, Forbes, and the New York Times.</p> <p>By Friday night, the company's security teams had classified the outage as "a cybersecurity incident."</p>

	<p>In a statement released March 4, PressReader said it was working to restore services and make content available to users. The company added that its investigation into the cyber-attack had not found any evidence that customer data had been compromised.</p> <p>“PressReader’s technical teams have been working around the clock to address the recent disruptions to services,” said the statement.</p> <p>“Our security teams have now classified this as a cyber security incident. This situation comes as companies across North America have seen an increase in security incidents over the past several weeks.”</p> <p>With operations restored in the early hours of Sunday morning, PressReader has begun the process of restoring editions of titles that were disrupted.</p> <p>“Our teams have been working relentlessly on restoring operations and we are now able to process and release current newspapers and magazines, however, we continue to scale these systems back to their full capacity,” said Press Reader in a user update posted March 6.</p> <p>The cyber-attack came days after the company removed dozens of Russian titles from its catalog and publicly stated that it would help the Ukrainian citizens access the news following Russia’s invasion of their country.</p> <p>On February 25, the company said on social media: “In order to assist those in Ukraine with accessing up-to-date information, we are opening all PressReader content in the country without charge to individuals. PressReader will absorb the cost paid to publishers until further notice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Romania gas station network ransom attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/rompetrol-gas-station-network-hit-by-hive-ransomware/
GIST	<p>Romania's Rompetrol gas station network has been hit by a ransomware attack.</p> <p>A subsidiary of KMG International, Rompetrol announced today that it is dealing with a "complex cyberattack" that forced it to shut down its websites and the Fill&Go service at gas stations.</p> <p>'Fill&Go' gas station service, websites down</p> <p>Today, Romania's petroleum provider Rompetrol has announced that it is battling a "complex cyberattack."</p> <p>BleepingComputer has learned that Hive ransomware gang is behind this attack, and they're asking for a multi-million ransom.</p> <p>Rompetrol is the operator of Romania's largest oil refinery, Petromidia Navodari, which has a processing capacity of over five million tons per year.</p> <p>As one of the largest oil companies, KMG International operates in fifteen countries throughout Europe, Central Asia, and North Africa. KMG's primary activities involve refining, marketing, trading, production, and oil industry services like drilling, EPCM, and transportation.</p> <p>"During this night, Rompetrol faced a complex cyberattack," announced the subsidiary today in a Facebook post seen by BleepingComputer:</p> <p>BleepingComputer also observed both KMG and Rompetrol websites are not reachable as of today and the Fill&Go application is no longer working. We learned though, that the company's email system (Microsoft Outlook) remains functional.</p> <p>KMG International's sites and Fill&Go app are inaccessible today</p>

KMG has already [notified](#) the Romanian National Directorate of Cyber Security (DNSC) who is in constant contact with the organization to remedy the problem and provide the necessary assistance.

"To protect the data, the company has temporarily suspended the operation of the websites and the Fill&Go service, both for the fleets and for the private customers," states the petroleum provider.

"The activity of Rompetrol gas stations is carried out normally, the customers having at their disposal the option of payment in cash or by bank card."

According to an anonymous tip to BleepingComputer, the threat actor also reached the internal IT network of the Petromidia refinery.

But, Rompetrol states, the operations at the Petromidia refinery are not affected.

In an email to employees, the company said that the attack was detected at 21:00 hours (local time) on Sunday and that it affected "most of the IT services."

Hive demands \$2 million ransom

BleepingComputer has learned that Hive Ransomware gang is behind the attack on KMG subsidiary Rompetrol. We have also learned that Hive is demanding a \$2 million ransom from Rompetrol to receive a decryptor and not to leak allegedly stolen data.

The Hive ransomware gang is more active and aggressive than its leak site shows, with affiliates attacking [an average of three companies every day](#) since the operation became known in late June 2021.

The group is known to employ a diverse set of tactics, techniques, and procedures, which makes it difficult for organizations to defend against its attacks, as the FBI has [earlier stated](#).

Hive's last year attack on Memorial Health System led to the [cancellation of surgical and diagnostic operations](#), and patient data theft.

Before the attack, KMG had [announced](#) over the weekend that Rompetrol Rafinare would suspend its operations between March 11 and April 3, as part of planned maintenance:

"The technological shutdown is a necessity for the good functioning of the refinery units and is part of the general strategy of the Group, through which a precise calendar of activities has been established, with general turnarounds carried out every 4 years and technological shutdowns scheduled every 2 years," KMG had earlier said.

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HEADLINE	03/07 FBI: fake govt. officials; extortion scams
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-govt-officials-impersonated-in-widespread-extortion-schemes/
GIST	<p>Scammers are impersonating government officials and law enforcement in active and rampant extortion schemes targeting Americans' money or personally identifiable information (PII).</p> <p>Cybercriminals use fake credentials belonging to well-known US government and law enforcement agencies.</p> <p>They are also spoofing authentic phone numbers in these scam attempts, the FBI revealed in a public service announcement published on Monday.</p> <p>"The FBI is warning the public of ongoing widespread fraud schemes in which scammers impersonate law enforcement or government officials in attempts to extort money or steal personally identifiable information," the FBI warned.</p>

"Scammers will use an urgent and aggressive tone, refusing to speak to or leave a message with anyone other than their targeted victim; and will urge victims not to tell anyone else, including family, friends, or financial institutions, about what is occurring."

Targets are threatened with arrest, prosecution, or imprisonment for various bogus reasons or asked to provide sensitive information because they were affected by a data breach or their documents have expired and need to be renewed.

Those extorted and threatened with fake legal consequences are told to pay various sums of money using prepaid cards or overseas wire transfers. Some are also asked to pay using cash, either by mail or via cryptocurrency ATMs.

If it's a phone call or an email, it's a scam

However, as the FBI says, government officials or law enforcement authorities will never reach out by phone to demand payments or to request personal/sensitive information.

The FBI added that you would only be contacted in person or by official letters following legitimate legal actions or investigations. You should never comply with any requests before asking for credentials to validate police or government officials' identities.

As the US federal law enforcement agency further explained in today's advisory:

- NO legitimate law enforcement or government official requests payment via prepaid cards or cryptocurrency ATM.
- Never give anyone personally-identifying information without verifying the person is who they say they are.

Today's PSA comes after the FBI warned in February that BEC (business email compromise) scammers are [impersonating CEOs in virtual meetings](#) and are increasingly targeting US organizations and individuals.

The federal agency also said cybercriminals are [escalating SIM swap attacks](#) to steal millions by hijacking their targets' phone numbers.

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HEADLINE	03/08 CISA: patch 2 critical Firefox zero-days
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-patch-actively-exploited-firefox-zero-days-until-march-21st/
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has ordered federal civilian agencies to patch two critical Firefox security vulnerabilities exploited in attacks within the next two weeks.</p> <p>According to a Mozilla advisory published over the weekend, the two bugs (tracked as CVE-2022-26485 and CVE-2022-26486) are Use After Free flaws that allow attackers to trigger crashes and execute maliciously crafted code on targeted devices.</p> <p>They're rated as critical severity because they could let attackers execute almost any command on systems running vulnerable versions of Firefox, including downloading malware that would give them further access to the device.</p> <p>Mozilla said it received "reports of attacks in the wild" abusing the two vulnerabilities, likely used for remote code execution (CVE-2022-26485) and escaping the browser sandbox (CVE-2022-26486).</p> <p>According to a binding operational directive (BOD 22-01) issued in November, Federal Civilian Executive Branch Agencies (FCEB) agencies are now required to secure their systems against these vulnerabilities, with CISA giving them until March 21st to apply patches.</p>

"These types of vulnerabilities are a frequent attack vector for malicious cyber actors of all types and pose significant risk to the federal enterprise," the US cybersecurity agency [explained](#).

CISA added nine other vulnerabilities to its [Known Exploited Vulnerabilities Catalog](#) based on evidence that threat actors are also actively exploiting them in the wild.

One of them tracked as CVE-2021-21973, impacts VMware vCenter servers, leads to information disclosure, and also has to be patched within two weeks.

CVE ID	Vulnerability Name	Due Date
CVE-2022-26486	Mozilla Firefox Use-After-Free Vulnerability	03/21/22
CVE-2022-26485	Mozilla Firefox Use-After-Free Vulnerability	03/21/22
CVE-2021-21973	VMware vCenter Server, Cloud Foundation Server Side Request Forgery (SSRF)	03/21/22
CVE-2020-8218	Pulse Connect Secure Code Injection Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2019-11581	Atlassian Jira Server and Data Center Server-Side Template Injection Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2017-6077	NETGEAR DGN2200 Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2016-6277	NETGEAR Multiple Routers Remote Code Execution Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2013-0631	Adobe ColdFusion Information Disclosure Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2013-0629	Adobe ColdFusion Directory Traversal Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2013-0625	Adobe ColdFusion Authentication Bypass Vulnerability	09/07/22
CVE-2009-3960	Adobe BlazeDS Information Disclosure Vulnerability	09/07/22

Even though BOD 22-01 only applies to FCEB agencies, CISA strongly urged all other private and public sector orgs to reduce their exposure to ongoing cyberattacks by prioritizing mitigation of these security flaws.

"These types of vulnerabilities are a frequent attack vector for malicious cyber actors of all types and pose significant risk to the federal enterprise," CISA added.

CISA has added hundreds of vulnerabilities to its catalog of actively exploited bugs this year, ordering federal agencies to patch them as soon as possible to avoid security breaches.

Just last week, on Friday, the agency added 95 bugs to the list, eight of them with high critical severity scores of at least 9.8 and impacting Cisco, Apache, and Exim products.

Since the start of the year, the US cybersecurity agency ordered federal civilian agencies to patch actively exploited bugs in:

- [Zabbix servers](#)
- [Google Chrome and Adobe Commerce/Magento Open Source](#)
- [iPhones, iPads, and Macs](#)
- Windows systems [[1](#), [2](#)]

HEADLINE	03/08 Google: state hackers hit Ukraine, Europe
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/google-russia-china-belarus-state-hackers-target-ukraine-europe/
GIST	<p>Google says Russian, Belarusian, and Chinese threat actors targeted Ukrainian and European government and military organizations, as well as individuals, in sweeping phishing campaigns and DDoS attacks.</p> <p>The company's Threat Analysis Group (TAG), a dedicated team of security experts that works to defend Google users from state-sponsored attacks, has alerted hundreds of Ukrainians they've been targeted.</p> <p>"In the last 12 months, TAG has issued hundreds of government-backed attack warnings to Ukrainian users alerting them that they have been the target of government-backed hacking, largely emanating from Russia," said Shane Huntley, Google's TAG lead.</p> <p>"Over the past two weeks, TAG has observed activity from a range of threat actors that we regularly monitor and are well-known to law enforcement, including FancyBear and Ghostwriter. This activity ranges from espionage to phishing campaigns."</p> <p>Phishing for European and Ukrainian credentials</p> <p>For instance, Huntley said that the FancyBear hacking group (aka APT28), part of Russia's Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (also known as GRU), launched several large-scale credential phishing campaigns using compromised email accounts and redirecting targets to attacker-controlled Blogspot domains.</p> <p>Belarusian threat actor Ghostwriter (aka UNC1151) was also observed by Google TAG while targeting Polish and Ukrainian military and government organizations during the last seven days.</p> <p>The Computer Emergency Response Team of Ukraine (CERT-UA) and Facebook previously warned of other phishing campaigns against Ukrainian officials and military personnel, also attributed Ghostwriter hackers (previously linked with high confidence by Mandiant to the Belarusian government).</p> <p>Cybersecurity firm Proofpoint also spotted spear-phishing attacks targeting European government personnel aiding Ukrainian refugees, a campaign aligned with and likely related to July 2021 phishing attacks also attributed to the Ghostwriter hacking group.</p> <p>Russia and Belarus are not the only ones attacking Ukrainian and European orgs. Huntley says that China-based hacking group Mustang Panda (aka Temp.Hex and TA416) also switched from regular Southeast Asian targets to European entities, now using phishing lures related to the Ukrainian invasion.</p> <p>On Monday, Proofpoint revealed that it also detected Mustang Panda phishing activity "targeting European diplomatic entities, including an individual involved in refugee and migrant services."</p> <p>DDoS attacks launched from Ukraine and Russia</p> <p>As BleepingComputer previously reported, this deluge of ongoing attacks has also included DDoS attacks targeting Ukrainian government agencies and state banks, as well as multiple series of destructive malware attacks [1, 2].</p> <p>Google TAG also detected "DDoS attempts against numerous Ukraine sites, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as services like Liveuamap that are designed to help people find information".</p> <p>To help websites belonging to Ukrainian government websites, embassies worldwide, and other governments stay online throughout these attacks, Google also expanded eligibility for Project Shield, the company's free protection service against distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks.</p> <p>According to Google, more than Ukrainian 150 websites, including many news organizations, have registered and are using the service to block incoming DDoS attacks.</p>

	<p>Last week, the Russian government also shared a list of over 17,000 IP addresses allegedly used to launch DDoS attacks targeting Russian organizations and their networks.</p> <p>Ukraine's Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov previously announced the creation of an "IT army" that would support the country's "fight on the cyber front."</p> <p>The creation of the Ukrainian IT Army was prompted by a "massive wave of hybrid warfare," and it was only revealed after the Defense Ministry of Ukraine began recruiting Ukraine's underground hacker community to launch cyberattacks against Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Coinbase blocks Russia crypto addresses
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/coinbase-blocks-over-25-000-russian-linked-crypto-addresses/
GIST	<p>Coinbase, one of the most popular cryptocurrency exchange platforms, announced today that it's blocking access to more than 25,000 blockchain addresses linked to Russian individuals and entities.</p> <p>The company also shared all the block addresses with the US government to "further support sanctions enforcement.</p> <p>Paul Grewal, Coinbase's Chief Legal Officer, added that the crypto exchange is blocking sanctioned actors from opening new accounts and actively detecting attempts to evade the ban.</p> <p>The ban addresses sanction lists maintained by countries worldwide, including the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, United Nations, Singapore, Canada, and Japan.</p> <p>"For example, when the United States sanctioned a Russian national in 2020, it specifically listed three associated blockchain addresses. Through advanced blockchain analysis, we proactively identified over 1,200 additional addresses potentially associated with the sanctioned individual, which we added to our internal blocklist," Grewal said.</p> <p>"Today, Coinbase blocks over 25,000 addresses related to Russian individuals or entities we believe to be engaging in illicit activity, many of which we have identified through our own proactive investigations."</p> <p>Exchanges' reply to call for Russian blanket ban</p> <p>This comes after Ukraine's Vice Prime Minister Mykhailo Fedorov also asked all major crypto exchanges to block blockchain addresses used by Russians to increase pressure and force them to take action against their government's ongoing war in Ukraine.</p> <p>"It's crucial to freeze not only the addresses linked to Russian and Belarusian politicians, but also to sabotage ordinary users," Fedorov said.</p> <p>Coinbase and other crypto exchanges, including Binance, refused to freeze all Russian users' accounts but said they would comply with US and European Union economic sanctions imposed on Russia after its armed forces invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>Binance and Coinbase spokespersons added that, while they will not block all Russian accounts on their platforms, the crypto exchanges will take steps to identify all sanctions entities and individuals and block their accounts and transactions.</p> <p>While Coinbase cited "economic freedom in the world" to explain this decision, Binance said it was about "greater financial freedom for people across the globe" and banning users' access to their cryptocurrency "would fly in the face of the reason why crypto exists."</p>

	"Sanctions play a vital role in promoting national security and deterring unlawful aggression, and Coinbase fully supports these efforts by government authorities," Grewal added today.
	"They are best placed to decide when, where, and how to apply them."
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HEADLINE	03/07 Critical infrastructure: 52 entities breached
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-ransomware-gang-breached-52-us-critical-infrastructure-orgs/
GIST	<p>The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) says the Ragnar Locker ransomware gang has breached the networks of at least 52 organizations from multiple US critical infrastructure sectors.</p> <p>This was revealed in a joint TLP:WHITE flash alert published on Monday in coordination with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.</p> <p>"As of January 2022, the FBI has identified at least 52 entities across 10 critical infrastructure sectors affected by RagnarLocker ransomware, including entities in the critical manufacturing, energy, financial services, government, and information technology sectors," the federal law enforcement agency said [PDF].</p> <p>"RagnarLocker ransomware actors work as part of a ransomware family, frequently changing obfuscation techniques to avoid detection and prevention."</p> <p>The flash alert focuses on providing indicators of compromise (IOCs) organizations can use to detect and block Ragnar Locker ransomware attacks.</p> <p>IOCs associated with Ragnar Locker activity include info on attack infrastructure, Bitcoin addresses used to collect ransom demands, and email addresses used by the gang's operators.</p> <p>Although the FBI first became aware of Ragnar Locker in April 2020, Ragnar Locker ransomware payloads were first observed in attacks months before, during late December 2019.</p> <p>Ragnar Locker operators terminate remote management software (e.g., ConnectWise, Kaseya) used by managed service providers (MSPs) to manage clients' systems remotely on compromised enterprise endpoints.</p> <p>This allows the threat actors to evade detection and make sure remotely logged-in admins do not interfere with or block the ransomware deployment process.</p> <p>Request for info linked to Ragnar Locker attacks</p> <p>The FBI asked admins and security professionals who detect Ragnar Locker activity to share any related information with their local FBI Cyber Squad.</p> <p>Useful info that would help identify the threat actors behind this ransomware gang includes copies of the ransom notes, ransom demands, malicious activity timelines, payload samples, and more.</p> <p>The FBI added that it doesn't encourage paying Ragnar Locker ransoms since victims have no guarantee that paying will prevent leaks of stolen data or future attacks.</p> <p>Instead, ransom payments will further motivate the ransomware gang to target even more victims and incentivizes other cybercrime operations to join in and launch their own ransomware attacks.</p> <p>However, the federal agency did recognize the damage inflicted to businesses by ransomware attacks, which may force executives to pay ransoms and protect shareholders, customers, or employees.</p>

	<p>The FBI also shared mitigation measures to block such attacks and strongly urged victims to report such incidents to their local FBI field office.</p> <p>Since December, the FBI also revealed that Cuba ransomware compromised the networks of at least 49 US critical infrastructure entities, while the BlackByte ransomware gang hit at least three others.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Vendors free services at-risk Russia attacks
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/cloud/trio-of-vendors-offer-free-services-to-organizations-at-risk-of-russian-cyberattacks
GIST	<p>A trio of vendors have teamed up to offer a range of free cybersecurity services to organizations in three US critical infrastructure sectors to help prepare them for potential cyberattacks from Russia.</p> <p>The Critical Infrastructure Project is a collaborative effort between CrowdStrike, Cloudflare, and Ping Identity. As part of the initiative, the three vendors are providing step-by-step guidance to organizations in water, power utilities, and healthcare sectors on how to quickly implement a multi-layered zero-trust defense for protecting against phishing, malware, and destructive cyberattacks.</p> <p>The vendors are offering a broad range of their products for free for at least the next four months. This includes technologies like Cloudflare's cloud gateway, DNS filtering, and web application firewall technology; CrowdStrike's Falcon endpoint protection and Falcon X threat monitoring; and Ping Identity's PingOne for detecting suspicious sign-on attempts and its DaVinci identity orchestration service.</p> <p>"This program is designed to help US critical infrastructure that has been identified as particularly vulnerable to cyberattacks," a CrowdStrike spokeswoman says. "This includes energy and water utilities of all sizes, from towns and municipalities to regional or national providers. Likewise, all public and private hospitals and hospital systems of all sizes will be eligible." There is no seat limit or size cutoff in terms of organization size.</p> <p>Ukraine Crisis</p> <p>The immediate impetus for the program is the heightened risk of cyberattacks tied to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the spokeswoman says. Many security experts have warned about the high likelihood of retaliatory and spillover attacks from Russia-based actors over US-led sanctions against the country.</p> <p>Andre Durand, CEO and founder of Ping Identity, describes the initiative as an opportunity for the three vendors to come together to help organizations combat new global risks. "Whether it's securing employee identities or enabling customers to provide secure digital experiences, identity security is mission critical for enterprises across the world," he says.</p> <p>The main focus of the guidance from the three vendors is implementing key security controls at speed. The security features available for free through the initiative are designed to help organization secure distinct risk surfaces and to work with each other to provide a multi-layered defense against cyberattacks, according to the three vendors.</p> <p>These include secure DNS filtering, single sign-on, multifactor authentication, endpoint protection, secure Web gateways, zero-trust access controls, DNS security, and risk monitoring and management. The program provides organizations with phased milestones for implementing each security control and a checklist of items for hitting those milestones. "All products are designed to be deployed in hours, not days, but the timeline suggested gives organizations a template based on team member availability," according to a description of the program.</p> <p>For example, the first item on the checklist for organizations is to deploy, within the hour, global DNS filtering as a defense against malware and phishing attacks using Cloudflare's 1.1.1.2 DNS service. The checklist provides for one day to implement more targeted DNS filtering and logging via Cloudflare's Gateway DNS Filter and to strengthen account sign-on for users via Ping Identity's PingOne SSO. The</p>

Critical Infrastructure Defense Project guide's implementation targets for the first week include controls against lateral movement and spear-phishing via Cloudflare Access; tools for detecting malware with CrowdStrike's Falcon Endpoint Protection Pro technology; and threat monitoring and tracking with CrowdStrike Falcon X Recon.

Echoes of Previous Security Freebie Efforts

Tanner Johnson, an analyst at Omdia, says that initiatives like this are extremely helpful, and offer substantive opportunities for organizations to benefit. "A great deal of the complications we face in the cybersecurity domain simply stem from a reactionary cultural attitude," Johnson says. "Sadly, the harsh truth is that many organizations fail to plan for cyber threats in any meaningful way, until they are forced to deal with the consequences of one first hand."

So, any initiative that offers guidance on where organizations should begin without overwhelming them with the sheer number of security options has considerable value. "If organizations actively take advantage of such initiatives, they can establish a better understanding of their own security postures, outline their individual attack response plans, while providing greater overall protection for their crown jewels," he says.

This is not the first time that any of the vendors have been involved in such an effort.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cloudflare, for instance, offered its Cloudflare for Teams products for free to small businesses around the world. Similarly, the company lent its technology for free to help state and local governments to protect election websites under an effort called the Athenian Project.

In the past, CrowdStrike has offered free services during times of cyber crises as well. One example is a tool that the company made available for free in Dec. 2020 to help organizations identify and mitigate risks in Azure Active Directory after several critical vulnerabilities were discovered in the technology.

And in March 2020, Ping Identity offered its Cloud SSO and multifactor authentication technologies for free for a six-month period for companies struggling to secure their (at the time) new work-from-home workforce.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Industrial systems see more vulnerabilities
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/industrial-systems-see-more-vulnerabilities-greater-threat
GIST	<p>The real threats to industrial control systems (ICS) became clearer in 2021, as the number of vulnerabilities discovered in operational technology (OT) devices and the systems that manage those devices jumped by more than half, while ransomware groups continued to target manufacturing and critical infrastructure.</p> <p>The number of vulnerabilities reported in 2021 increased 52% to nearly 1,440, compared with the previous year, according to industrial cybersecurity firm Claroty's biannual report released last week. In addition, cybersecurity researchers branched out — 21 of the 82 vendors affected by security flaws in their software or firmware had not previously had vulnerabilities reported in their systems. Nearly two-thirds of the discovered security issues could be exploited remotely, Claroty's report stated.</p> <p>The increase in vulnerabilities — as well as researchers' forays into previously explored vendors' products — shows that there is greater interest in industrial control systems, says Amir Preminger, vice president of research at Claroty.</p> <p>"They [attackers] are trying to learn and gain access to industrial control systems, and these vulnerabilities are going to be their playground," he says. "A lot of the vulnerabilities that we have seen do not require high complexity to exploit, and when you talk about ICS, the barrier is very very low — you don't have to hack three layers of the cloud to exploit these."</p>

The Colonial Pipeline Wake-up Call

II and OT have become significant concerns for cybersecurity policy-makers because, by their nature, they turn digital threats into physical risks. The ransomware attack on the IT systems of petroleum-delivery firm Colonial Pipeline in May 2021, for example, [led to the business shutting down oil and gas deliveries](#), resulting in surging gas prices and shortages at the pump.

In addition, cybersecurity researchers have seen an increased focus on industrial control systems, because attackers have targeted operational technology in the run-up to the Ukraine War. On Feb. 26, for example, the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) [warned that Russia attackers had released significant attacks](#) prior to the invasion of Ukraine, using two wiper programs to cause outages in government services.

Overall, attacks against critical infrastructure and industrial control systems have become more prevalent because an increasing body of research has given attackers a greater understanding of the systems and because cybercriminal schemes — most notably, ransomware — has made attacks against operational systems profitable, Dean Parsons, a certified SANS instructor and industrial cybersecurity professional, [wrote in a SANS report released last week](#).

"We are seeing adversaries are being more clever to attack industrial environments, because they see a quicker to pay and pay more," he says. "These threats will not go away because the adversaries are seeing a return on their investment."

Because attackers also have more access to research on OT and ICS, that barrier to entry has practically disappeared. As a result, more vendors of industrial control systems, operational technologies, and Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) devices are facing reported vulnerabilities in their products, [according to the Claroty report](#). While Siemens, a major provider of industrial control technology, continues to be the vendor with the most reported vulnerabilities — 251 in the second half of 2021 — a quarter of the vendors in the second half and a third of the vendors in the first half did not have a vulnerability discovered in the past 12 months.

"These are good examples of vendors that have had no CVE [identified vulnerability] in their products," suddenly finding their technology under the microscope, Claroty's Preminger says. "It is not due to the fact that they don't have vulnerabilities. The increase is from security researchers finally getting ahold of the technology and being able to conduct research."

Patching Conundrum

Only 69% of the ICS vulnerabilities discovered in the second half of 2021 could be fully remediated, highlighting another issue of industrial control systems and OT — the difficulty in updating software and devices that are part of critical infrastructure.

"These cycles can take significantly longer than traditional IT patch management, often making mitigations the only remediation option open to defenders," Claroty stated in its report. "Vendors and internal security analysts and managers must also prioritize tracking of vulnerabilities in end-of-life products and in products where updates may be challenging or downtime is unacceptable."

While vulnerabilities are increasing, they are not the best measure of the risk facing manufacturers, since many companies — such as Siemens — are proactively finding the issues and closing them before attackers can exploit them. More important is that companies understand the actions that attackers are taking, whether exploiting specific vulnerabilities or finding other ways of attack critical infrastructure, says the SANS Institute's Parsons.

ICS and OT security has different considerations than IT security, and they cannot be handled the same way, Parsons says.

	<p>"Sure there are vulnerabilities there, but we should not focus on the vulnerabilities, we should focus on what the adversaries are doing," he says. "We need to have more network-specific visibility — without that, we are literally blind to what attackers are doing to the industrial control systems. Visibility is key to getting ahead of this stuff."</p> <p>In fact, 86% of companies that hired a cybersecurity provider had a lack of visibility across their operational technology networks, allowing external connections to their OT systems, according to a report by critical infrastructure security firm Dragos. The cybersecurity provider found that two groups — Conti and LockBit 2.0 — had made extensive use of industrial firms' lack of visibility, accounting for 51% of ransomware attacks against companies.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Anonymous hacked Russia TV channels
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-hack-russia-tv-streaming-service-ukraine-war/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>According to Anonymous, three Russian-state TV channels, Russia 24, Moscow 24, and Channel One and two Netflix-like Russian streaming services, Ivi and Wink, were targeted in the attack.</p> <p>The popular hacking collective Anonymous claims to have hacked streaming services and several state TV channels in Russia to air footage of the war in Ukraine. The latest cyber attack came just a week after the group interrupted transmissions of several State TV channels in Russia to play the Ukrainian national anthem.</p> <p>Three Russia State TV Channels Hacked</p> <p>On the evening of March 6th, 2022, Anonymous took to Twitter to post footage of the alleged hacking of Russian state TV. According to Anonymous, three Russian-state TV channels, Russia 24, Moscow 24, and Channel One and two Netflix-like Russian streaming services, Ivi and Wink, were targeted in the cyberattack. The footage was posted with the following caption:</p> <p><i>The hacking collective #Anonymous today hacked into the Russian streaming services Wink and Ivi (like Netflix) and live TV channels Russia 24, Channel One, Moscow 24 to broadcast war footage from #Ukraine. #TangoDown #OpRussia.</i></p> <p>The clip posted by Anonymous shows the skyline of a war-torn town in Ukraine, and then the footage shifts focus to a man recording footage of an unexploded Russian missile. The screen then displays an anti-war message from the group claiming that the Russian public resents this war.</p> <p>“Ordinary Russians are against the war”, the message read. Anonymous posted another tweet claiming that they have hacked all Russian state TV channels with more images of onscreen messages from the gang. “All Russian-state TV channels have been hacked.”</p> <p>The sole objective of this hack, according to Anonymous, was to show the realities of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Anonymous Declared Cyberwar on Russia</p> <p>Hackread earlier reported that Anonymous publicly threatened Russian President Vladimir Putin after Russia invaded Ukraine in a supposed peacekeeping mission. On February 27th, 2022, the group posted a video message warning Putin of grave consequences and an upcoming cyberwar if his forces do not evacuate Ukraine.</p> <p>Later, the websites of the Russian government, the Russian defense ministry, and Russian firms like Gazprom were targeted and defaced. Shortly after, a cyberattack was launched against an EV charging station in Moscow, interrupting services at the facility.</p>

	<p>The station's screens displayed anti-Putin and anti-government messages and support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Furthermore, on March 4th, 2022, Anonymous carried out another cyber attack and defaced the official website of the Russian Space Research Institute.</p> <p>The hacktivist group also tweeted download links claiming claims it contained data stolen from the Russian space agency Roscosmos.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 MS Excel files deliver Emotet Trojan
SOURCE	https://www.fortinet.com/blog/threat-research/ms-office-files-involved-in-emotet-trojan-campaign-pt-one?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Recently, Fortinet's FortiGuard Labs captured more than 500 Microsoft Excel files that were involved in a campaign to deliver a fresh Emotet Trojan onto the victim's device.</p> <p>Emotet, known as a modular Trojan, was first discovered in the middle of 2014. Since then, it has become very active, continually updating itself. It has also been highlighted in cybersecurity news from time to time. Emotet uses social engineering, like email, to lure recipients into opening attached document files (including Word, Excel, PDF, etc.) or clicking links within the content of the email that download Emotet's latest variant onto the victim's device and then execute it.</p> <p>Our FortiGuard Labs team has monitored Emotet Trojan campaigns in the past and posted numerous technical analysis blogs.</p> <p>This time, I grabbed an Excel file from the captured samples and conducted deep research on this campaign. In this part I of my analysis, you can expect to learn: how an Excel file is leveraged to spread Emotet, what anti-analysis techniques Emotet uses in this variant, how it maintains persistence on a victim's device, how this Emotet variant communicates with its C2 server, and how other modules are delivered, loaded, and executed on a victim's system.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Fake purchase order delivers Agent Tesla
SOURCE	https://www.fortinet.com/blog/threat-research/fake-purchase-order-used-to-deliver-agent-tesla?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Since the dawn of phishing, fraudulent invoicing and purchasing schemes have been one of the most common lures. The usual modus operandi involves appealing to the recipient's desire to avoid incurring a debt, especially where a business may be involved.</p> <p>FortiGuard Labs recently came across an interesting phishing e-mail masquerading as a purchase order addressed to a Ukrainian manufacturing organization that deals with raw materials and chemicals. The e-mail contained a PowerPoint attachment that is in reality a sophisticated, multi-stage effort to deploy the Agent Tesla RAT (Remote Access Trojan).</p> <p>What makes this campaign unique is the usage of PPAM, which is a file format that is not very common. A PPAM is a Microsoft PowerPoint add-in that gives developers extra functionality, such as extra commands, custom macros, and new tools. This blog will detail the infection process and subsequent malware deployment.</p> <p>Threat actors for the most part like to use lures that are tried and true, as was the case here with the invoicing phishing e-mail, because they continue to enjoy success. The dropper attached to the phishing e-mail shows the continuing evolution and complexity required to evade modern security controls combined with the need to traverse several gates to arrive at the release point for the final payload.</p>

	Once finally deployed to a system, the ability to obfuscate and hide inside everyday files and processes proves that Agent Tesla is a very capable and formidable threat. Unfortunately, this trend towards increasing sophistication is unlikely to abate any time soon.
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HEADLINE	03/08 Critical bugs expose medical devices
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/access7-iot-vulnerabilities-medical-devices-atms/
GIST	<p>SPECIALIZED HEALTH CARE devices, from imaging tools like CT scanners to diagnostic lab equipment, are often inadequately protected on hospital networks. Now, new findings about seven vulnerabilities in an Internet of Things remote management tool underscore the interconnected exposures in medical devices and the broader IoT ecosystem.</p> <p>Researchers from the health care security firm CyberMDX, which was acquired last month by the IoT security firm Forescout, found seven easily exploited vulnerabilities, collectively dubbed Access:7, in the IoT remote access tool PTC Axeda. The platform can be used with any embedded device, but has proven particularly popular in medical equipment. The researchers also found that some companies have used it to remotely manage ATMs, vending machines, barcode scanning systems, and some industrial manufacturing equipment. The researchers estimate that the Access:7 vulnerabilities are in hundreds of thousands of devices in all. In a review of its own customers, Forescout found more than 2,000 vulnerable systems.</p> <p>“You can imagine the type of impact an attacker could have when they can either exfiltrate data from medical equipment or other sensitive devices, potentially tamper with lab results, make critical devices unavailable, or take them over entirely,” says Daniel dos Santos, head of security research at Forescout.</p> <p>Some of the vulnerabilities relate to issues with how Axeda processes undocumented and unauthenticated commands, allowing attackers to manipulate the platform. Others relate to default configuration issues, like hard-coded, guessable system passwords shared by multiple Axeda users. Three of the seven vulnerabilities rate as critical and the other four are medium to high severity bugs.</p> <p>Attackers could potentially exploit the bugs to grab patient data, alter test results or other medical records, launch denial of service attacks that could keep health care providers from accessing patient data when they need it, disrupt industrial control systems, or even gain a foothold to attack ATMs.</p> <p>Vulnerabilities aren’t necessarily uncommon in this space, but these would be particularly easy for an attacker to take advantage of. If exploited, the potential damage of the Access:7 bugs could be comparable to that of a recent spate of ransomware attacks, which all stemmed from hackers exploiting flaws in IT management software from a firm called Kaseya. The products are different, but their ubiquity creates similar conditions for disruptive attacks. And Access:7 fits into a larger picture of inveterate IoT insecurity and historic, unresolved vulnerabilities.</p> <p>The researchers worked on coordinated disclosure with PTC, which has released patches for the flaws, as well as the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, H-ISAC, and the Food and Drug Administration.</p> <p>“This disclosure is the culmination of a cooperative effort between PTC, CyberMDX, and CISA,” PTC told WIRED in a statement. “PTC and CyberMDX collaborated to thoroughly investigate and implement appropriate remediations for the vulnerabilities. PTC then notified customers and guided their remediations ahead of disclosure. ... The result is greater awareness for users and the opportunity to resolve a potential threat to their systems and data.”</p> <p>As with any IoT vulnerability disclosure, one of the big challenges is notifying customers, or former customers, and getting them to update their software or take other steps to mitigate their exposure. Axeda users who don't want to risk disrupting critical systems by patching can still take protective steps like blocking certain network ports and adjusting configurations. And Forescout's dos Santos notes that one</p>

advantage of the situation is that the vast majority of vulnerable devices are not exposed on the open internet, meaning they can't be directly hacked remotely.

Still, he cautions that vulnerable systems will be remotely accessible to an attacker who compromises a hospital or business network through other means.

"It will take time for the downstream vendors to identify which devices are vulnerable on their networks and actually apply the patches on their products, so that's why it's important to raise awareness," dos Santo says. "Remote management tools work to address some real problems for IoT, but the way this was deployed and configured also leads to problems."

It's a conundrum that has dogged IoT for years: Devices, particularly sensitive health care-related devices, need to be easily patchable. But flaws in the mechanisms that enable that remote management create a whole new area of risk.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Russia plunges into digital isolation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/technology/russia-ukraine-internet-isolation.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>Even as President Vladimir V. Putin tightened his grip on Russian society over the past 22 years, small pockets of independent information and political expression remained online.</p> <p>Any remnants of that are now gone.</p> <p>As Mr. Putin has waged war on Ukraine, a digital barricade went up between Russia and the world. Both Russian authorities and multinational internet companies built the wall with breathtaking speed. And the moves have ruptured an open internet that was once seen as helping to integrate Russia into the global community.</p> <p>TikTok and Netflix are suspending their services in the country. Facebook has been blocked. Twitter has been partly blocked, and YouTube's future is in doubt. Apple, Samsung, Microsoft, Oracle, Cisco and others have pulled back or withdrawn entirely from Russia. Even online video games like Minecraft are no longer available.</p> <p>The actions have turned Russia into a walled-off digital state akin to China and Iran, which tightly control the internet and censor foreign websites and dissent. China's internet and the Western internet have become almost completely separate over the years, with few overlapping services and little direct communication. In Iran, the authorities have used internet blackouts during protests.</p> <p>Russia's cleaving off is a defeat for the once-held Western belief that the internet is a tool for democracy that would lead authoritarian countries to open.</p> <p>"The vision of a free and open internet that runs all over the world doesn't really exist anymore," said Brian Fishman, a senior fellow at the New America think tank and former director of counterterrorism policy at Facebook. "Now the internet is lumpy. It has choke points."</p> <p>The internet is only one piece of Russia's growing isolation since it invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24. The country has been largely cut off from the world's financial system, foreign airlines are not flying in Russian airspace and global access to its oil and natural gas reserves is in question.</p> <p>But the digital cutoffs stand out as the culmination of attempts by the Russian authorities to tame what was once an open and freewheeling internet. For years, officials stiffened a censorship campaign at home and tried to move toward what is known as a "sovereign internet." The war led multinational companies to take the final steps.</p>

While Russia is paying a stiff economic cost for being cut off, the digital isolationism also serves Mr. Putin's interests. It allows him to [clamp down further on dissent](#) and information that does not follow the government line. Under a censorship law passed last week, journalists, website operators and others risk 15 years in prison for publishing "misinformation" about the war on Ukraine.

"This is going to feel like a return to the 1980s for people who lived in that era, because suddenly information is back in the hands of the state," said Alp Toker, director of NetBlocks, a London organization that tracks internet censorship.

Internet censorship efforts in Russia have grown for the past decade, said Tanya Lokot, an associate professor at Dublin City University who specializes in digital rights in Eastern Europe. Mr. Putin first cracked down on government critics and independent news outlets online. Russia then began a campaign to install [new censorship equipment](#) to block or slow down access to websites like Twitter.

But the final break since the invasion began has jarred Russians who used the internet to stay connected with the wider world, get independent information and build their careers.

Aleksei Pivovarov, who quit his job on state television almost a decade ago in the face of growing censorship, said he had experienced a "second birth" when he started producing news shows and distributing them on YouTube. Almost three million people subscribe to his [YouTube channel](#), where he and a team publish investigations and news reports that are unavailable on state media.

"I was completely sure that this part of my life was over forever, and I would never work as a journalist again," he said in a recent interview. "I never thought before I came to YouTube that it was possible."

Now the work risks putting Mr. Pivovarov in jail — or out of business. YouTube, which is owned by Google, last week blocked all Russian accounts from making money from their videos and barred Russian state television outlets from being shown across Europe. YouTube could be one of the next targets to be blocked by Russian regulators, experts predicted.

Mr. Pivovarov, 47, who is based in Moscow, said he planned to keep broadcasting on YouTube despite the risks. But he said it was unclear how long he could keep going.

"For the moment I do plan to work in Russia," he said. "How this may change in the future, especially if YouTube will be blocked, I don't know."

Unlike China, where domestic internet companies have grown into behemoths over more than a decade, Russia does not have a similarly vibrant domestic internet or tech industry.

So as it is cordoned off into its own digital ecosystem, the fallout may be severe. In addition to access to independent information, the future reliability of internet and telecommunications networks, as well as the availability of basic software and services used by businesses and government, is at risk.

Already, Russian telecom companies that operate mobile phone networks no longer have access to new equipment and services from companies like Nokia, Ericsson and Cisco. Efforts by Russian companies to develop new microprocessors were in doubt after Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the largest maker of essential semiconductors, halted shipments to the country. Yandex, Russia's largest internet company, with a search engine more widely used than Google in Russia, [warned](#) it might default on its debts because of the crisis.

"The whole IT, hardware and software market that Russia relies on is gravely damaged right now," said Aliaksandr Herasimenka, a researcher at the University of Oxford's program on democracy and technology. The Russian authorities could respond by loosening rules that have made it illegal to download pirated software, he said.

The Ukrainian government has also pressured internet service providers to sever access in Russia. Officials from Ukraine have asked ICANN, the nonprofit group that oversees internet domains, to suspend the Russian internet domain “.ru.” The nonprofit has resisted these requests.

Denis Lyashkov, a self-taught web developer with more than 15 years of experience, said Russia’s censorship campaign was “devastating” for those who had grown up with a less restricted internet.

“I was 19 years old when I bought my first computer, and it was the best investment in my life,” said Mr. Lyashkov, who emigrated to Armenia from Moscow in the past week because of the growing restrictions. “When I started, it was a whole new world. There were no borders, no censorship. Everyone could say anything they wanted.”

Mr. Lyashkov said that before he had fled Russia, the company where he worked received a demand from the government to install new government certificates on its website, a technical change that could allow regulators to monitor traffic and potentially close the country’s internet to all but Russian or other approved websites. Last year, Russia [tested](#) taking such a step.

Some Russian internet users appeared to be finding ways around tighter restrictions. Demand for virtual private networks, technology that lets people access blocked websites by masking their location, soared more than 600 percent since the invasion, according to Top10VPN, a service that tracks usage of the technology.

But other decisions by multinational companies to punish Russia’s aggression could make those circumvention tools harder to obtain. Many Russians who have VPNs pay for them using Visa and Mastercard, which have blocked payments in Russia.

“That move only helps the Kremlin in my view, unfortunately,” Mr. Pivovarov said.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Dutch disrupt Russia spy agency botnet
SOURCE	https://intelnews.org/2022/03/07/01-3165/
GIST	<p>ON MARCH 3, 2022, Dutch newspaper <i>Volkscrant</i> reported that the Dutch Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) took action in response to abuse of SOHO-grade network devices in the Netherlands. The attacks are believed to have been perpetrated by the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces (GRU) Unit 74455. The unit, which is also known as Sandworm or BlackEnergy, is linked to numerous instances of influence operations and sabotage around the world.</p> <p>The devices had reportedly been compromised and made part of a large-scale botnet consisting of thousands of devices around the globe, which the GRU has been using to carry out digital attacks. The MIVD traced affected devices in the Netherlands and informed their owners, MIVD chief Jan Swillens told <i>Volkscrant</i>. The MIVD’s discovery came after American and British [pdf] services warned in late February that Russian operatives were using a formerly undisclosed kind of malware, dubbed Cyclops Blink. According to authorities, the botnet in which the compromised devices were incorporated has been active since at least June 2019.</p> <p>Cyclops Blink leverages a vulnerability in WatchGuard Firebox appliances that can be exploited if the device is configured to allow unrestricted remote management. This feature is disabled by default. The malware has persistence, in that it can survive device reboots and firmware updates. The United Kingdom’s National Cyber Security Centre describes Cyclops Blink as a “highly sophisticated piece of malware”.</p> <p>Some owners of affected devices in the Netherlands were asked by the MIVD to (voluntarily) hand over infected devices. They were advised to replace the router, and in a few cases given a “coupon” for an alternative router, according to the <i>Volkscrant</i>. The precise number of devices compromised in the Netherlands is unclear, but is reportedly in the order of dozens. Swillens said the public disclosure is</p>

	<p>aimed at raising public awareness. “The threat is sometimes closer than you think. We want to make citizens aware of this. Consumer and SOHO devices, used by the grocery around the corner, so to speak, are leveraged by foreign state actors”, he added.</p> <p>The disclosure can also be said to fit in the strategy of public attribution that was first mentioned in the Netherlands’ Defense Cyber Strategy of 2018. Published shortly after the disclosure of the disruption by MIVD of an attempted GRU attack against the computer network of the OPCW, the new strategy included the development of attribution capabilities, as well as the development of offensive capabilities in support of attribution. It advocates the view that state actors “that are [publicly] held accountable for their actions will make a different assessment than attackers who can operate in complete anonymity”.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Samsung: data, Galaxy source code stolen
SOURCE	https://www.theverge.com/2022/3/7/22965220/samsung-hack-lapsus-galaxy-source-code-confirmed-nvidia
GIST	<p>Hackers have successfully stolen internal company data and source code for Galaxy devices from Samsung, the South Korean tech giant confirmed today.</p> <p>News of the breach was first reported earlier this month, with a hacking outfit named Lapsus\$ claiming responsibility. The group, which recently hacked Nvidia, shared screenshots purportedly showing roughly 200GB of stolen data, including source code used by Samsung for encryption and biometric unlocking functions on Galaxy hardware.</p> <p>In a statement today, Samsung did not confirm or deny the identity of the hackers, nor whether or not they had stolen data related to encryption and biometrics. But, the company said that no personal data, belonging either to employees or customers, had been taken.</p> <p>“There was a security breach relating to certain internal company data,” said Samsung in a statement reported by Bloomberg News and SamMobile. “According to our initial analysis, the breach involves some source code relating to the operation of Galaxy devices, but does not include the personal information of our consumers or employees. Currently, we do not anticipate any impact to our business or customers. We have implemented measures to prevent further such incidents and will continue to serve our customers without disruption.”</p> <p>In the case of the recent Nvidia hack, the hacking group Lapsus\$ attempted to blackmail the company, threatening to leak data online unless Nvidia removed cryptocurrency mining limiters from certain GPUs and made the drivers for these video cards open source. It’s not clear if Lapsus\$ has made any threats to Samsung trying to extort specific concessions.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	03/07 UN: 397 civilians died since Taliban control
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/03/07/afghanistan-nearly-400-civilians-died-afghanistan-since-taliban-takeover/2681646681881/
GIST	<p>March 7 (UPI) -- Nearly 400 civilians have died in Afghanistan since the Taliban seized power of the country in August, the United Nations said in a report Monday.</p> <p>Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in the new report that 397 civilians have died as a result of fighting in the country.</p> <p>"While the decline in hostilities has seen a sharp decrease in civilian casualties, the human rights situation for many Afghans is of profound concern," Bachelet said.</p>

"The Afghan people face a devastating humanitarian and economic crisis that severely impacts their enjoyment of the full range of economic, social and cultural rights."

Bachelet said the Islamic State Khorasan Province, an offshoot of ISIS, has conducted several suicide and non-suicide attacks against Shi'a Muslims, mostly from the Hazara ethnic group.

"More than half the population now suffer extreme levels of hunger. An increase in child labor, child marriage and the sale of children has been observed," she said.

Bachelet noted that women's protection shelters have been closed leaving many women at risk and that "justice systems established to deal with cases of gender-based violence are largely non-functional."

"Afghan women and girls have called for their rights to fully participate in all aspects of civic, economic, political and public life. I fully endorse these legitimate demands," she said.

Human rights activists have been killed while civil society activists have been imprisoned and media workers have been arrested and beaten by the Taliban.

"We have received credible reports of the extra-judicial killings of more than 100 former members of the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces or government personnel, or their family members, carried out by the de facto authorities or their affiliates since August," Bachelet said.

Bachelet also noted that Afghanistan has suffered a "full-scale economic crash" as sanctions that had been previously applied to the Taliban are now effectively in place against the country's government.

Last month, President Joe Biden -- who has received criticism for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country in August -- [signed an executive order](#) starting the process of taking \$3.5 billion in frozen assets connected to Afghanistan to be used largely for humanitarian aid to the country.

"The United States has sanctions in place against the Taliban and the Haqqani network, including for activities that threaten the safety of Americans such as holding our citizens hostage," the White House said.

"While this [executive order] will help preserve a substantial portion of Afghanistan's reserves to benefit the Afghan people, we understand there are no easy solutions for Afghanistan's economic challenges, which have been exacerbated by the Taliban's forced takeover of the country."

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HEADLINE	03/07 State Dept. designates KTJ as terror group
SOURCE	https://www.stl.news/us-state-department-terrorist-designation-of-ktj/507189/
GIST	<p>Washington, DC (STL.News) The US Department of State released the following statement:</p> <p>The United States is committed to addressing terrorist activity in ungoverned spaces in Syria through the judicious use of our counterterrorism tools and constructive engagement with our partners.</p> <p>In keeping with that commitment, the Department of State is designating Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ) as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) pursuant to Executive Order 13224, as amended. In addition to this SDGT designation, KTJ has also been added to the UNSC 1267/1989/2253/2610 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List, requiring all UN member states to implement an assets freeze, a travel ban, and an arms embargo against KTJ.</p> <p>Affiliated with al-Qa'ida, KTJ operates primarily in Idlib Province, Syria alongside Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and cooperates with other designated terrorist groups such as Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari and Islamic Jihad Group. In addition to engaging in terrorist activities in Syria, KTJ has also been responsible for conducting external attacks, such as the Saint Petersburg metro attack in April 2017 which killed 14</p>

	<p>passengers and injured 50 others, as well as a suicide car bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in August 2016 which wounded three people.</p> <p>As a result of the SDGT designation, all property and interests in property of KTJ that are subject to U.S. jurisdiction are blocked, and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in any transactions with it. Foreign financial institutions that knowingly conduct or facilitate any significant transaction on behalf of KTJ could also be subject to U.S. sanctions.</p> <p>Designations of terrorist individuals and groups expose and isolate them and deny them access to the resources they need to carry out attacks. Moreover, designations can assist the law enforcement actions of other U.S. agencies and governments.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 French forces kill AQ official in Mali
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/french-forces-kill-long-time-extremist-in-mali-amid-pullout/2022/03/07/30fcda16-9e46-11ec-9438-255709b6cddc_story.html
GIST	<p>PARIS — French forces in Mali have killed a long-time al-Qaida official active in Algeria and Libya, French military authorities said Monday.</p> <p>France’s army chief of staff said in a statement that Algerian Yahia Djouadi, who went by the name Abou Ammar al Jazairi, was killed north of Timbuktu Feb. 26 in a ground operation supported by a helicopter and two drones.</p> <p>The operation took place about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Timbuktu in a zone known as a hideout for al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and two other extremist groups, including the JNIM, a coalition of jihadi groups.</p> <p>The operation was significant for France because it’s in the process of withdrawing its forces from Mali to reposition them elsewhere in the region.</p> <p>The decision to withdraw was announced last month amid increasing hostility toward the French armed presence in Mali. France moved into Mali in 2013 in an effort to stop a drive by Islamist extremists into Bamako, the capital.</p> <p>Islamists have regrouped and continue to pose a major threat. On March 4, at least 27 Malian soldiers were killed while repulsing an attack by an armed group, leaving 47 of the attackers dead, according to Malian authorities. Two Malian soldiers were killed Monday.</p> <p>The statement said that Djaoudi’s killing demonstrates that French forces continue to mark battlefield successes despite the withdrawal.</p> <p>Djaoudi got his start with the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria, which terrorized Algeria in the early 1990s at the start of the country’s “black decade” that left an estimated 200,000 people, soldiers, civilians and extremists, dead.</p> <p>The GIA was dissolved and Djaoudi eventually became military aide to Abdelmalek Droukdel, AQMI chief until French forces in Mali killed him in June 2020. Djaoudi also worked for the al-Qaida arm in Libya before relocating to Timbuktu, Mali in 2019, the French statement said. He coordinated supplies for AQMI and JNIM as well as assisting in financing.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 Bomb explodes near Pakistan govt. building
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/police-bombing-in-southwest-pakistan-kills-3-wounds-28/
GIST	<p>QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — A bomb exploded Tuesday near a government building in southwest Pakistan, killing at least three people and wounding 28 others, police said.</p>

	<p>No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack in Sibi, in Baluchistan. Wazir Murree, a local police official, said rescuers transported the dead and wounded to hospitals, where an emergency had been declared.</p> <p>He provided no further details and only said some of those listed as wounded were in critical condition. Local media said the blast happened near an open area where an annual cultural show was being held.</p> <p>The bombing happened hours after Pakistan's President Arif Alvi attended the festival in Sibi.</p> <p>Baluchistan is the scene of a long-running insurgency by small Baluch secessionist groups which for decades have staged attacks on security forces and police to press their demands for independence.</p> <p>Although authorities say they have quelled the insurgency, violence has continued in the province. Local militants and sleeper cells of the Islamic State also have a presence there.</p> <p>Tuesday's bombing in Baluchistan happened days after a suicide bomber dispatched by the Islamic State struck inside a Shiite Muslim mosque in the northwestern city of Peshawar during Friday prayers, killing at least 57 worshippers and wounding 194 people.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Taliban 'most-wanted' leader in public
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dggvix/sirajuddin-haggani-taliban-first-public-appearance
GIST	<p>One of the Taliban's most secretive leaders has appeared in public for the first time, despite being a US-designated terrorist with a \$10 million bounty on his head.</p> <p>Sirajuddin Haqqani was photographed during a graduation ceremony for newly-trained recruits at a police academy in Kabul on Saturday.</p> <p>As well as being the head of the notorious Haqqani network, a semi-autonomous Islamist militia within the Taliban, Haqqani is also Afghanistan's acting interior minister. For years he has kept his face hidden for fear of being captured or killed by the US-led coalition and their allies in Afghanistan. The last time Haqqani appeared in public – at an event held for the families of suicide bombers last October – his face was blurred.</p> <p>In a brief speech on Saturday, he said he hoped his appearance would “build trust” between Afghans and the Taliban government. He said that the international community should not see the Taliban government as a “threat,” acknowledged “some misconduct” by Taliban fighters since the group seized power last August, and called on Afghans who had left the country to return home.</p> <p>Since returning to power the Taliban has been isolated internationally and presided over an economic collapse, while the country teeters on the brink of a humanitarian crisis and allegations of widespread brutality persist.</p> <p>Haqqani appeared with a long beard and wearing a traditional outfit with a black turban and a long white scarf wrapped around it. He breathed heavily while talking and struggled to recite a well-known phrase from the Quran – a detail that many Afghans who have fled the country took a grim irony in pointing out on social media.</p> <p>Haqqani, who is addressed by the title "Caliph" by his militiamen, has inherited a network of Pashtun fighters who were formerly led by his late father Jalaluddin Haqqani.</p> <p>Jalaluddin Haqqani was a warlord who grew into prominence during the anti-Soviet war, but later ended up on the wrong side of the alliance that put a new government in Kabul after the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan because of close relations with al Qaeda. The Haqqani Network was designated a terrorist organisation, and members of the Haqqani family were hunted down in several operations. But the group</p>

	<p>has been active in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan and responsible for several deadly attacks that have killed hundreds of civilians during the past 20 years of war in Afghanistan.</p> <p>The FBI's profile of Haqqani says that he is "wanted for questioning in connection with the January 2008 attack on a hotel in Kabul that killed six people, including an American citizen".</p> <p>"He is believed to have coordinated and participated in cross-border attacks against the United States and coalition forces in Afghanistan."</p> <p>The Haqqani family's comeback has produced some awkward moments for the Taliban, whose leaders have tried to soften its image as the group has openly praised suicide bombers.</p> <p>The group has also gained substantial power in the current Taliban-led government, controlling the interior ministry as well as the notorious Ministry for Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Gitmo: '20th hijacker' repatriated to Saudis
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/us/politics/saudi-arabia-911-hijacker.html
GIST	<p>GUANTÁNAMO BAY, Cuba — The Biden administration on Monday repatriated to Saudi Arabia for mental health care a prisoner who had been tortured so badly by U.S. interrogators that he was ruled ineligible for trial as the suspected would-be 20th hijacker in the Sept. 11 attacks.</p> <p>The prisoner, Mohammed al-Qahtani, in his 40s, is the second to be transferred from the wartime prison under the administration.</p> <p>A government panel recommended recently that Mr. Qahtani, who had spent 20 years at Guantánamo Bay, be released after a Navy doctor advised that he was too impaired to pose a future threat — particularly if he was sent to inpatient mental care. The doctor last year upheld an independent psychiatrist's finding that Mr. Qahtani suffered from schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder, and could not receive adequate care at the U.S. military prison.</p> <p>His long-serving lawyer, Shayana Kadidal of the Center for Constitutional Rights, said the transfer was long overdue.</p> <p>"For 14 years I've sat across from Mohammed as he talks to nonexistent people in the room and makes eye contact with the walls — something that's been a constant part of his life since his teens," Mr. Kadidal said. "It's an extraordinary relief that the next time the voices in his head tell him to swallow a mouthful of broken glass, he'll be in a psychiatric facility, not a prison."</p> <p>Mr. Qahtani's case was controversial to the end. Three Republican senators asked the president last week in a letter to halt all transfers from Guantánamo, and in particular to keep Mr. Qahtani at the prison. "We are concerned that he may try to resume terrorist activity once released from U.S. custody," wrote Senators James M. Inhofe of Oklahoma, Jim Risch of Idaho and Marco Rubio of Florida.</p> <p>The U.S. military airlifted Mr. Qahtani from remote Guantánamo on Sunday, soon after the clock ran out on the 30 days' notice Congress requires for a detainee transfer. In an unusual move, the Saudi government did not send its own aircraft to retrieve him, which delayed the announcement of his release until the U.S. military transfer operation was complete.</p> <p>Mr. Qahtani's notoriety is linked to his attempt to enter the United States on Aug. 4, 2001, when an immigration inspector at the airport in Orlando, Fla., turned him away. U.S. authorities later discovered that he was to be met there by Mohamed Atta, a ringleader of the attacks that were carried out by 19 hijackers and killed nearly 3,000 people in four almost simultaneous hijackings the next month.</p> <p>Mr. Qahtani found his way to Afghanistan and was captured along the Pakistani border in late 2001. At Guantánamo, the U.S. military isolated him while nude, disoriented and sleep-deprived in a wooden hut at</p>

Camp X-Ray in [late 2002 and early 2003](#), and questioned him brutally and relentlessly. A senior Bush administration official later concluded that the torture made him ineligible for prosecution. Later, his lawyers disclosed that he had sustained a traumatic brain injury as a youth in Saudi Arabia and then was diagnosed with schizophrenia there, circumstances that also could have made him ineligible for trial.

The transfer follows the repatriation [in July of a Moroccan man](#), Abdul Latif Nasser, whose release was mostly arranged in the dwindling days of the Obama administration but was never acted upon by the Trump administration.

In a [statement announcing Mr. Qahtani's release from](#) Guantánamo, the Pentagon thanked Saudi Arabia and other partner countries for supporting U.S. efforts to reduce the prison population with the goal of ultimately closing the facility.

“After two decades of indefinite detention, Mr. Qahtani finally has a chance to heal from the torture he suffered, receive mental health care Guantánamo can’t provide and hopefully one day reclaim his life,” said Scott Roehm, the Washington director of the Center of Victims Against Torture. “His transfer is a welcome incremental step, but the Biden administration needs to act much faster and more comprehensively to close Guantánamo than it has so far.”

The transfer left 38 detainees at Guantánamo, half of them approved for release if the State Department can reach security agreements with receiving countries that satisfy the secretary of defense. Of the rest, 12 have been charged with war crimes, including two men who have been convicted.

The other seven are held as “law of war” prisoners, essentially detained indefinitely because the United States considers them too dangerous to release. Their cases are reviewed periodically by a U.S. government panel, which can recommend a transfer with certain security measures, including restrictions on travel or to detention in overseas prisons.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/07 Report: Iran plot to kill Bolton uncovered
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/bolton-iran-plot/2022/03/07/id/1060079/
GIST	<p>U.S. intelligence has uncovered a plot by two Iranians with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard's covert-action Quds Force to assassinate former national security adviser John Bolton, the Washington Examiner reports.</p> <p>The Biden administration is reportedly resisting publicly indicting the men for fear that the move could derail its drive for a nuclear deal with Iran. This has left the FBI and prosecutors "frustrated and angry" with the White House for not issuing any indictments "and suspect political foot-dragging," according to the report.</p> <p>The U.S. on Monday said it was "getting closer" to reaching a nuclear deal with Iran, hours after a meeting in Latvia's capital, Riga, between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid.</p> <p>Speaking to reporters in a daily press briefing, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said there are "important components" that both sides have yet to agree on.</p> <p>"It's no secret we have our differences on this, but it's a conversation between allies that have a common goal, which is preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear threshold country, and to stop Iran's ability to spread terror and instability all around the world," Lapid said.</p>

	<p>Blinken responded that both Israel and the United States are "united and committed to the proposition that Iran must never obtain a nuclear weapon."</p> <p>U.S. officials became aware of the plot to kill Bolton "earlier this year or late in 2021."</p> <p>As a result, Bolton was given a full-time Secret Service detail alongside other FBI "assets."</p> <p>The Department of Justice refused to discuss the report.</p> <p>"As a matter of Department policy, we do not confirm or deny non-public law enforcement activity," a DOJ spokesman told the Examiner. "In every case, the Department's decision whether to charge would be made based on the facts and law and in accordance with the principles of federal prosecution."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/08 Australia flooding unprecedented disaster
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/k7wkqx/australia-record-floods-climate-change
GIST	<p>At least 20 people have died, 20,000 homes flooded and more than 60,000 people placed under evacuation warnings as Australia continues to be swamped by some of the worst floods in the country's history.</p> <p>A record-breaking "rain bomb" has devastated communities down Australia's east coast over the past fortnight, as torrential downpours sweep south from Queensland down through New South Wales, triggering flash floods that have submerged houses, destroyed businesses and left throngs of people homeless.</p> <p>On Tuesday, two bodies, believed to be that of a 67-year-old woman and her adult son, were discovered in a storm water drain in flood-ravaged western Sydney, taking the official death toll to 20. At least five people have died in NSW's Northern Rivers region, while across the border in Queensland at least 13 people have lost their lives.</p> <p>Flood waters in Lismore, a city in NSW about 45 kilometres inland from Byron Bay, rose to more than 14 metres last week, turning the streets into canals and forcing residents onto their rooftops to await rescue by boat.</p> <p>Emergency services expect that number to rise as rescue crews carry out recovery efforts and swaths of the country continue to be battered by what Stephanie Cooke, the NSW minister for emergency services, has described as "a natural disaster of unprecedented proportions."</p> <p>The disaster engulfed the suburbs around Sydney's northern beaches on Tuesday, prompting an evacuation order for 2,000 people as Manly Dam reached capacity and spilled its banks. Footage of flooded arterial roads and semi-submerged cars spread across social media as the Northern Beaches region was all but cut off from the rest of the city by an insurmountable moat.</p> <p>In the 24 hours from Monday night to Tuesday night, the NSW State Emergency Service received 3,000 calls for help and performed 150 flood rescues.</p> <p>Residents of flood-affected areas have condemned state and federal governments for what they perceive as a lack of support, claiming most of the rescue and recovery efforts—including delivering food, water and medical supplies, as well as saving vulnerable people from rising floodwaters—have fallen on them. Many have criticised Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel deployed to the disaster zones for not doing enough, saying soldiers are capitalising on the chaos for photo opportunities.</p> <p>In one video widely shared on social media, 10 ADF officers can be seen filming themselves unloading a trailer before dumping its contents out of shot by the side of the road.</p>

In the wake of this criticism, the number of troops on the ground is [expected to grow to 5,000](#) by the end of the week. Those troops will spend the next few days helping clear roads and fixing telecommunication networks, and will use helicopters to drop critical supplies to cut-off communities, according to the [Australian Associated Press](#).

Others have derided Australian government officials for describing the event as [“one-in-1,000-year floods”](#)—especially in light of an [apocalyptically dire report](#) released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) late last month.

That report, which forecasted an increased likelihood of extreme weather events, said that what is currently considered a “one-in-100-year flood event” could begin to happen “several times a year.” The findings were described by UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres as an “atlas of human suffering” and “a damning indictment of failed climate leadership.”

“This abdication of leadership is criminal,” Guterres said. “The world's biggest polluters are guilty of arson of our only home.”

Australia has the highest emissions per capita and per unit of GDP among developed nations. Its government is also infamous for dragging its heels on climate policy, displaying a lack of environmental leadership and in many cases remaining silent about addressing climate change—even as the nation has been wracked by historic droughts, fires and floods in recent years.

“Australia is consistently ranked dead last based on our weak climate performance,” Will Steffen, a climate scientist at the Climate Council, told the [ABC](#) last week. “This government's failings on this critical issue will go down as the defining policy and leadership failure of the past decade.”

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HEADLINE	03/08 NKorea rebuilding nuclear test site?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/north-korea-satellite-images-suggest-building-work-at-nuclear-test-site-for-first-time-since-2018
GIST	<p>Commercial satellite imagery shows construction at North Korea’s nuclear testing site for the first time since it was closed in 2018, US-based analysts said on Tuesday, adding to concerns the country could resume testing major weapons.</p> <p>Images captured by satellite on Friday showed very early signs of activity at the Punggye-ri site, including construction of a new building, repair of another building, and what is possibly some lumber and sawdust, specialists at the California-based James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) said in a report.</p> <p>“The construction and repair work indicate that North Korea has made some decision about the status of the test site,” the report said.</p> <p>North Korea tested a record number of missiles in January, including its largest weapon since 2017, and appears to be preparing to launch a spy satellite.</p> <p>International monitors have also reported the North’s main nuclear reactor facility at Yongbyon appears to be in full swing, potentially creating fuel for nuclear weapons.</p> <p>Punggye-ri has been shuttered since North Korea declared a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear weapons tests in 2018. Leader Kim Jong-un, however, has said he no longer feels bound by that moratorium with denuclearisation talks stalled since 2019.</p> <p>At the time, North Korea said it was closing the site’s tunnels with explosions, blocking its entrances, and removing all observation facilities, research buildings and security posts. It invited a handful of foreign</p>

media to observe the demolition, but refused to allow international inspectors, leading to speculation the facilities could be restored.

In South Korea, where voters will elect a new president on Wednesday, the national security council said on Sunday it was paying particularly close attention to Yongbyon and Punggye-ri, without elaborating.

The CNS analysts said the changes at Punggye-ri occurred only in the past few days, and it is still difficult to conclude what precisely is being built or why.

“One possibility is that North Korea plans to bring the test site back to a state of readiness to resume nuclear explosive testing,” the report said.

The CNS analysts cautioned the test site is many months, if not years, from being ready for new nuclear explosions.

“How long it would take North Korea to resume explosive testing at the site depends on the extent of the damage to the tunnels themselves, something we do not know with confidence,” they wrote in the report. “It is also possible that North Korea will resume nuclear testing at another location.”

Punggye-ri is North Korea’s only known nuclear test site. It conducted six nuclear weapons tests in tunnels at the site from 2006 to 2017. North Korea’s last and largest nuclear test appeared to trigger geological instability that has since caused multiple small earthquakes, but analysts and US intelligence officials have said the site could probably be used again.

A Pentagon spokesperson, Lt Col Marty Meiners declined to comment on matters of intelligence or commercial imagery analysis.

“However, we have been very clear on the threat posed by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) missile programs, and our commitment to the defence of the ROK, Japan, and the US homeland, and our commitment to uphold regional peace and stability,” he said, using the initials of the official names of North and South Korea.

The United States says it is open to talks without preconditions, but North Korea says Washington and its allies must first stop their “hostile policies.”

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HEADLINE	03/07 ‘Parachute’ spiders to spread East Coast?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/7/joro-parachute-spider-expected-to-spread-over-east/
GIST	<p>ATLANTA — Researchers say a large spider native to East Asia that proliferated in Georgia last year could spread to much of the East Coast.</p> <p>The Joro spider’s golden web took over yards all over north Georgia in 2021, unnerving some residents. The spider was also spotted in South Carolina, and entomologists expected it to spread throughout the Southeast.</p> <p>A new study suggests it could spread even farther than that. The Joro appears better suited to colder temperatures than a related species, researchers at the University of Georgia said in a paper published last month.</p> <p>It has about double the metabolism, a 77% higher heart rate and can survive a brief freeze that kills off its relatives, the study found.</p> <p>The researchers also noted that Joros are found in much of Japan, which has a similar climate to the U.S.</p>

	<p>“Just by looking at that, it looks like the Joros could probably survive throughout most of the Eastern seaboard here, which is pretty sobering,” study co-author Andy Davis said in a statement.</p> <p>The Joro - <i>Trichonephila clavata</i> - is part of a group of spiders known as orb weavers for their highly organized, wheel-shaped webs. Joro females have colorful yellow, blue and red markings on their bodies and can measure three inches (8 cm) across when their legs are fully extended.</p> <p>It’s not clear exactly how and when the first Joro spider arrived in the U.S. or why they were so abundant in Georgia last year.</p> <p>Their impact on native species and the environment is also not clear, though some researchers believe they are benign.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Study: Amazon nears point of no return
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/climate/amazon-rainforest-climate-change-deforestation.html
GIST	<p>The Amazon is losing its ability to recover from disturbances like droughts and land-use changes, scientists reported Monday, adding to concern that the rainforest is approaching a critical threshold beyond which much of it will be replaced by grassland, with vast consequences for biodiversity and climate change.</p> <p>The scientists said their research did not pinpoint when this threshold, which they described as a tipping point, might be reached.</p> <p>“But it’s worth reminding ourselves that if it gets to that tipping point, that we commit to losing the Amazon rainforest, then we get a significant feedback to global climate change,” said one of the scientists, Tim Lenton, director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter in England.</p> <p>Losing the rainforest could result in up to 90 billion tons of heat-trapping carbon dioxide getting put back into the atmosphere, he said, equivalent to several years of global emissions. That would make limiting global warming more difficult.</p> <p>Among previous studies there has been a large degree of uncertainty as to when such a threshold might be reached. But some research has concluded that deforestation, drying and other factors could lead to substantial forest dieback in the Amazon by the end of this century.</p> <p>Carlos Nobre, a senior scientist at the National Institute of Amazonian Research in Brazil and one of the first to sound alarm over the potential loss of the Amazon more than three decades ago, described the new study as “very compelling.”</p> <p>“It raised my level of anxiety,” said Dr. Nobre, who was not involved in the research.</p> <p>Covering more than two million square miles in Brazil and neighboring countries, the Amazon is the world’s largest rainforest, and serves a crucial role in mitigating climate change in most years by taking in more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it releases. In its diversity of plant and animal species, it is as rich as or richer than anywhere else on the planet. And it pumps so much moisture into the atmosphere that it can affect weather beyond South America.</p> <p>But climate change, together with widespread deforestation and burning for agriculture and ranching, has taken a toll on the Amazon, making it warmer and drier. The region, one of the wettest on Earth, has experienced three droughts since 2000.</p> <p>Most previous studies of resiliency in the Amazon relied on models, or simulations, of how forest health might change over time. In the new research, the scientists used actual observations: decades of remote sensing data from satellites that measure the amount of biomass in specific areas, which corresponds to</p>

their health. Looking only at pristine parts of the rainforest, the researchers found that overall since 2000 these areas lost resilience. For example, it took increasingly longer for forested areas to regain their health after suffering in a drought.

“That lack of resilience shows that, indeed, there is only so much of a beating that this forest can take,” said Paulo Brando, a tropical ecologist at the University of California, Irvine who was not involved in the study. “It’s reducing the ability to bounce back.”

But Dr. Brando said this was not necessarily a sign that a tipping point was unavoidable, and pointed to the need to stop clear-cutting and forest degradation in the region. “These systems are highly resilient, and the fact that we have reduced resilience doesn’t mean that it has lost all its resilience,” he said. “If you leave them alone for a little bit, they come back super strongly.”

The researchers found that more than three-quarters of the untouched rainforest lost resiliency over that time, and that the loss was greatest in areas that were drier or closer to human activities like logging.

The [study](#) was published in the journal Nature Climate Change.

Chris Boulton, a researcher at the University of Exeter and the study’s lead author, said that the Amazon was like a giant water recycling network, as moisture from evaporation and transpiration from trees is blown by winds. So the loss of some of the forest, and some of the moisture, leads to more drying elsewhere.

“You can imagine that as the Amazon dries you start to see that resilience being lost even faster and faster,” Dr. Boulton said. Forests might then decline and die off relatively quickly and become more like a savanna, with grasses and far fewer trees.

Not only would the loss of forest trees add the carbon stored in their tissues back into the atmosphere, savannas would also take up far less carbon than the large, broad-leafed trees they replaced. Savanna habitat would also support far fewer species.

Dr. Nobre said the research shows that the Amazon “is on the edge of this cliff, this switch to a different ecosystem.” And if it were to happen, he added, “that would be the new ecosystem for hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years.”

About 17 percent of the Amazon has been deforested over the past half-century, and while the pace of deforestation slowed for some years in Brazil, it has [picked up again more recently](#). The researchers said their work showed that efforts to stop deforestation would not just protect specific areas but have an effect on the resiliency of the Amazon as a whole.

“They are absolutely correct,” Dr. Nobre said. “We have to get to zero deforestation, zero forest degradation,” adding, “We still have a chance to save the forest.”

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/06 Gathering evidence war crimes in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/mar/06/leave-no-stone-untuned-how-investigators-gather-evidence-of-war-crimes-in-ukraine
GIST	Ukrainians fleeing the scenes of destruction and carnage in Ukraine are already being interviewed by investigators in anticipation of a future war crimes trial of Vladimir Putin , along with his top officials and generals.

With well over a million refugees crossing the border, there is an abundance of eyewitness testimony, while the flow of video footage through social media has provided an unprecedented amount of evidence which is being subjected to forensic analysis.

However, the sheer quantity of evidence is not necessarily a guarantee of a successful trial, and experienced war crimes investigators warn there is a long war to go before Putin and his regime are in the dock, in person or in absentia.

Multiple investigations have been launched at the same time, and it is not clear to what extent they are coordinated, if at all.

The prosecutor of the international criminal court (ICC) in The Hague has [opened an investigation](#), after a petition by an unprecedented 39 member states, and will almost certainly receive the most governmental support.

For example London's Metropolitan police's war crimes team has said it will gather evidence from any UK sources. The UN Human Rights Council has established a commission of inquiry, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in [Europe](#) has set up an expert mission. Meanwhile, several governments are helping the Ukrainian judicial system directly in the collection and safeguarding of evidence of atrocities committed on its territory.

The first organisation to start work was the [Pilecki Institute](#), a Polish thinktank studying the nature and impact of totalitarian regimes. It has set up the Raphael Lemkin Centre for the Documentation of Russian Crimes in Ukraine, named after the Polish Jewish lawyer who coined the word "genocide" and drafted the Genocide Convention.

It has already deployed researchers to start interviews in the hotels and community centres in Poland hosting refugees, and is recruiting more Ukrainian speakers.

"The scale of tragedy among civilians will be unbelievable, so every testimony is important, every detail is important," said Magdalena Gawin, the institute's director. She added that the centre is also in touch with Ukrainians from inside the country, sending information from the frontlines.

Bill Wiley, a Canadian ex-soldier who worked on both the Yugoslavia and Rwanda tribunals, cautions that the testimony from refugees who have crossed the border recently may have limited use in future war crimes trials.

Wiley now runs the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) which has gathered documentary evidence of war crimes in Syria. The archives CIJA amassed helped lead to a life sentence imposed by a German court in January on a former Syrian colonel, [Anwar Raslan](#), for crimes against humanity.

"It's extremely difficult to build these cases because you don't know what the attacking force is trying to hit," Wiley said. "When you're in a war of movement, it is very, very difficult, because the violence is constantly moving. International humanitarian law makes tremendous allowance - more than people realise - for incidental, or what the media calls collateral damage."

Wiley predicts the worst, most obvious, war crimes are likely to come if Russian forces manage to subdue and occupy Ukrainian cities.

"This is where I think we're gonna see pretty serious criminality," he said. "That's where we're going to see assassinations, disappearances, mass arrests, physical psychological abuse, serious physical, psychological abuse."

In previous war crimes cases, it has often been more straightforward to prove who committed an atrocity than to convict the chain of command that ordered it to be carried out.

“The crime base evidence is always the easier part,” said Clint Williamson, a former US ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues. “Linking it back to particular military units, linking it up the chain of command, is always the more challenging part of it.”

David Scheffer, an American lawyer who was first US war crimes envoy, predicted that such challenges could be less daunting in the case of Ukraine, than in other conflicts.

“Command responsibility is difficult to prosecute, but in this case I would expect it to be easier to prove in a courtroom as this is a superpower military with a definite chain of command and an obviously autocratic leader, Putin, who is leaving lots of footprints,” Scheffer said.

Once the evidence is gathered, the question will arise of which court should try the cases. The first two decades of the ICC’s existence have been difficult because the US, Russia and China have refused to join. Under the Trump administration, the US even sanctioned ICC prosecutors in an effort to stop investigations of the conflicts in Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territories.

In the case of Ukraine however, the US has offered to supply information to the court. Ukraine has given the ICC jurisdiction to investigate on its territory, so the prosecutor, Karim Khan, can begin to build cases for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

However, because Ukraine is not a party to the court (its parliament never ratified its membership), and because a Russian veto will stop it ever being referred by the UN security council, the ICC cannot address the crime of aggression. Philippe Sands, a law professor and director of the Centre on international courts and tribunals at University College London, said that is a “big gap” when it comes to accountability for Ukraine.

The crime of aggression, Sands said at a Chatham House discussion last week, “is the only crime which allows those responsible for the totality of the terrible events we are now witnessing to be held to account, to be judged.”

With the support of Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, former UK prime minister, Gordon Brown, among legal experts from around the world, Sands is seeking to persuade governments to fill the vacuum by setting up a special international criminal tribunal to try Putin and his regime for the overarching crime of waging an illegal war.

“If we’re committed to standing up for what is, in my view, a naked lawless act of aggression, we must leave no stone unturned,” he said.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Russia snubs UN court hearings
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-snubs-court-hearings-case-brought-ukraine-83292403
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- A representative for Kyiv urged the United Nations’ top court on Monday to order Russia to halt its devastating invasion of Ukraine, at a hearing snubbed by Russia amid its ongoing assault on its neighbor.</p> <p>Ukrainian representative Anton Korynevych told judges at the International Court of Justice: “Russia must be stopped and the court has a role to play in stopping it.”</p> <p>Ukraine has asked the court to order Russia to “immediately suspend the military operations” launched Feb. 24 “that have as their stated purpose and objective the prevention and punishment of a claimed genocide” in the separatist eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk.</p> <p>Lawyers for Kyiv dismissed the Russian claim.</p>

"Ukraine comes to this court because of a grotesque lie and to seek protection from the devastating consequences of that lie," David Zionts told the court. "The lie is the Russian Federation's claim of genocide in Ukraine. The consequences are unprovoked aggression, cities under siege, civilians under fire, humanitarian catastrophe and refugees fleeing for their lives."

A decision on Ukraine's request is expected within days.

If the court were to order a halt to hostilities, "I think the chance of that happening is zero," said Terry Gill, a professor of military law at the University of Amsterdam. He noted that if a nation does not abide by the court's order, judges could seek action from the United Nations Security Council, where Russia holds a veto.

Russia's seats at the Great Hall of Justice in the court's Peace Palace headquarters were empty for the hearing.

The court's president, American judge Joan E. Donoghue, said Russia's ambassador to the Netherlands, Alexander Shulgin, informed judges that "his government did not intend to participate in the oral proceedings."

Korynevych condemned Moscow's snub.

"The fact that Russian seats are empty speaks loudly," he said. "They are not here in this court of law. They are on a battlefield waging aggressive war against my country."

The request for so-called provisional measures is linked to a case Ukraine has filed based on the Genocide Convention. Both countries have ratified the 1948 treaty, which has a clause allowing nations to take disputes based on its provisions to the Hague-based court.

"Ukraine emphatically denies that any such genocide has occurred, and that the Russian Federation has any lawful basis to take action in and against Ukraine for the purpose of preventing and punishing genocide," the country said in its claim to the court.

Ukraine's nine-page legal filing launching the case argues that "Russia has turned the Genocide Convention on its head" by making a false claim. It adds that "Russia's lie is all the more offensive, and ironic, because it appears that it is Russia planning acts of genocide in Ukraine."

The success of Ukraine's request will depend on whether the court accepts it has "prima facie jurisdiction" in the case, which is not a guarantee that the court ultimately would proceed with the suit. Cases at the International Court of Justice typically take years to complete.

Regardless of the outcome of the hearings, they give Ukraine another platform to air grievances about Moscow's invasion.

"It's part of, I think, an overall diplomatic strategy to try to put maximum pressure on Russia," said Gill.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Seattle combats crime: Operation New Day
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattles-crime-crackdown-operation-new-day-continues-after-mayor-detailed-plan
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Three days after top city officials and police announced a stepped up operation to combat crime in Seattle, the effort -- dubbed Operation New Day -- continued Monday with several suspects now facing charges.</p> <p>On Friday, interim Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz, detailed the long list of arrests they've made in the Little Saigon community, some arrests were part of 'Operation New Day.'</p>

"We've arrested dozens of people suspected of felonies," Diaz said, adding that among those taken into custody were "arrests for illegal trafficking of fentanyl, cocaine, heroin."

Authorities said a group of 16 people, with ties to 12th Ave. and Jackson Street were some of those arrested for drug distribution, drug possession and illegal possession of guns. As U.S. Attorney Nick Brown, the top federal prosecutor for the Western District of Washington, said, four of those are now federal cases.

"It's a combination of narcotics dealing and firearms, (which are) always going to be a priority for the federal government," he said Monday. "That is a really dangerous combination and we've seen a rise in shootings across our city."

Casey McNerthney, spokesperson for the King County Prosecutors' Office, said: "I think we all see what's going on downtown. Everybody in that teamwork that was in Operation New Day on Friday has the same concerns. We want Seattle to look better than it is now."

McNerthney spoke about worries, that certain suspects arrested in these areas, are getting out of jail, given either a low bail, or sent on their own recognizance as granted by a judge.

"Whether somebody is in or out of custody, it's certainly a concern if we have somebody who's dangerous who is out of custody," he said. "But that's not going to change our charging decision."

The prosecutors office said more prosecutions linked to 'Operation New Day are expected.

KOMO News has reached out a spokesperson for the King County District Court to ask why judges made those decisions when it comes to these cases. They are working on a reply.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Facial recognition tech role in arrests
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/hidden-role-facial-recognition-tech-arrests/
GIST	<p>IN APRIL 2018, Bronx public defender Kaitlin Jackson was assigned to represent a man accused of stealing a pair of socks from a TJ Maxx store. The man said he couldn't have stolen the socks because at the time the theft occurred, he was at a hospital about three-quarters of a mile away, where his son was born about an hour later.</p> <p>Jackson couldn't understand how police had identified and arrested her client months after the theft. She called the Bronx District Attorney's Office, and a prosecutor told her police had identified her client from a security camera photo using facial recognition. A security guard at the store, the only witness to the theft, later told an investigator from her office that police had sent him a mugshot of her client and asked in a text message "Is this the guy?" Jackson calls that tactic "as suggestive as you can get."</p> <p>Jackson's questions led a judge to order a hearing to determine whether the identification process had been unduly suggestive. Shortly afterward, Jackson says, prosecutors offered her client a deal: Plead guilty to petit larceny in exchange for a sentence of time served. The client, who had been in jail for roughly six months, agreed.</p> <p>"I would have liked to go forward and go to hearings and go to trial because I think he very likely would have been acquitted, but sitting in jail waiting for that just did not make sense for him, so he ultimately took a misdemeanor plea deal" just to get out of jail, Jackson says. "He just wants to go on with his life."</p> <p>The prosecutor who told Jackson how her client had been identified was unusual. Across most of the US, neither police nor prosecutors are required to disclose when facial recognition is used to identify a criminal suspect. Defense attorneys say that puts them at a disadvantage: They can't challenge potential problems with facial recognition technology if they don't know it was used. It also raises questions of equity, since</p>

studies have shown that facial recognition systems are more likely to misidentify people who are not white men, including people with dark skin, women, and young people.

“Facial recognition technology use shouldn't be a secret,” says Anton Robinson, a former public defender now at the Innocence Project, a nonprofit dedicated to getting people who've been wrongly convicted out of prison. “It's such a big issue in criminal cases. Attorneys shouldn't be left to have these epiphany moments.”

Misidentification is historically a huge factor in sending innocent people to prison. The Innocence Project found that more than two-thirds of people exonerated through DNA evidence had been misidentified by witnesses, making it the leading factor in these convictions. Eyewitnesses can struggle to identify people they don't know, especially when those individuals are of different racial or ethnic backgrounds.

The rules regulating facial recognition use are gaining importance as more police agencies adopt the technology. In 2016, the Georgetown Center on Privacy and Technology [said](#) police in most US states had access to the tech and that photos of about half of US adults were in a facial recognition database. The report also warned that the technology would disproportionately hurt Black people because of the technology's higher error rates for people with dark skin. In a 2019 [report](#), the Georgetown center said New York police had made more than 2,800 arrests following face recognition searches between 2011 and 2017. Last year, BuzzFeed News [reported](#) that law enforcement agencies in 49 states, and more than 20 federal agencies, had at least tested facial recognition technology products from [Clearview AI](#).

A handful of US police departments, including in New York City and Detroit, have since adopted policies governing the use of facial recognition. The New York and Detroit policies require two people to review the results of a facial recognition scan before the results are turned over to detectives and say facial recognition alone cannot be used as probable cause to carry out a search warrant or arrest.

The New York policy took effect in March 2020. The latest version requires prosecutors to tell defendants when facial recognition is used to identify them. But defense attorneys say they suspect police are not always adhering to the policy. The NYPD [says on its website](#) that the department knows of no cases of false arrest based on the use of facial recognition in an investigation, but the department did not respond to questions about specific cases.

Jackson, the public defender, says police often obscure their use of facial recognition programs by crediting a witness with identifying a suspect. But the witness may have been shown photos generated by a facial recognition program. The use of facial recognition programs “gets papered over by these human identifications that only could have been made with the use of facial recognition,” she says.

Facial recognition searches that lead to criminal charges most commonly begin with an image, often from security cameras. That photo is run through a system that compares the image to those in a large database, like a collection of mugshots or driver's license photos. Florida's system includes more than 13 million mugshots and 25 million driver's license photos. A human analyst reviews the search results and picks out possible matches, which are then given to investigators.

The search results can include hundreds of photos, with confidence scores for each potential match. Investigators show potential matches to an eyewitness or police officer, and if they make a positive identification, they can typically testify at trial without ever mentioning facial recognition.

Facial recognition technology is improving, but it is still flawed. Error rates have fallen 90 percent since the National Institute for Standards and Technology began testing systems in 2018, says Patrick Grother, of NIST's [Image Group](#) that evaluates fingerprint, iris, and facial recognition software. The algorithms are better at analyzing low-quality images and recognizing aging faces, and some have made progress in recognizing faces from the side. Nevertheless, Grother says, “there's a considerable spectrum of accuracy” and “image quality remains an issue.” NIST's most recent test, which largely relies on a database of high-quality mugshot photos, found that even the best [algorithms](#) can be wrong more than 20 percent of the time.

Another problem: There are few rules governing the images police submit to facial recognition systems. In 2017, New York police believed that a theft suspect looked like Woody Harrelson, so they used a photo of the actor as a probe photo, then [arrested](#) the tenth person who appeared in a facial recognition search. Elsewhere, police have submitted artists' [sketches](#) of a suspect to facial recognition systems.

Fighting Facial Recognition in Court

Substances such as DNA found at crime scenes are treated as evidence in criminal investigations, but attorneys and tech policy analysts say they've not seen a facial recognition scan used as evidence at trial. Still, the technology may have helped identify a suspect, without the suspect or their legal team having been informed. This has prompted defense attorneys to hunt for hints that the technology was used and to devise strategies to force disclosure.

Jackson, the public defender, has created a guide for the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. She advises attorneys to ask what made detectives suspicious of their client. If the basis of suspicion is unclear, photos or videos are listed as evidence, and their client is identified by a stranger, Jackson says lawyers should suspect the use of facial recognition. Jackson advises lawyers to request supporting materials for an investigation, including a list of all of the candidates returned by a facial recognition system and the confidence scores assigned to them.

False identification with facial recognition led to the [arrests of Michael Oliver and Robert Williams](#) in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Attorneys representing the men say they've requested lists of all potential matches in those cases as part of lawsuits against police.

"If police picked number 65 produced by the system, the defense should be able to say, 'What about numbers one through 64?'" says Jumana Must, director of the Fourth Amendment Center at the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. "Any time a technology or something forensic or science is used in a court, the defense is supposed to have an opportunity to test that, to validate it, to see 'Does it do what you said it did?'"

Clare Garvie, a former senior associate at Georgetown's Center on Privacy and Technology, has spent the better part of a decade tracking police use of facial recognition and trained more than 2,000 defense attorneys on how to spot use of the technology. She advises them to look in arrest warrants for the names of companies that make facial recognition technology, police department units like the Facial Identification Section in New York City, or the names of specific police officers.

In her research, Garvie found that some analysts in Nebraska and Florida who were evaluating facial recognition search results were allowed to change the confidence level necessary to create a match. If, for example, a search with 90 percent accuracy returns no results, they can specify a lower accuracy rate and search again.

When defendants push back, police sometimes retreat, as may have happened with Jackson's case with the stolen socks. Garvie recalls a New York case where a man charged with multiple counts of robbery carrying a possible seven-year sentence was offered a plea deal for 20 hours of community service after a defense attorney requested information about a facial recognition system.

Because many cases are resolved with plea deals, Garvie says there hasn't been a clear test of whether disclosure is required. Oliver and Williams say they each considered plea deals before they were exonerated. "I think what we're waiting for, unfortunately, is probably a murder or rape case where the prosecution is not willing to plea out or drop charges," Garvie says.

Signs of Change

There are some signs of change. Laws took effect last year in [Utah](#) and [Washington state](#) requiring police to disclose the use of facial recognition in criminal cases. The Washington law specifies that police cannot use facial recognition alone to establish probable cause in an investigation; it also requires independent tests of any facial recognition systems used by state agencies. Attorneys in both states said it was too soon to tell whether these laws are having an effect. Several other states are considering similar laws.

A proposed change to a 2021 Massachusetts law would stipulate that all records related to facial recognition searches be turned over to defendants, including other possible matches returned by facial recognition systems and the accuracy rate of predictions made by the tech.

Late last year, a group representing chiefs of police from major US cities, including New York, [called for](#) police to disclose when facial recognition is used to help identify a suspect. Christian Quinn, a coauthor of the report, is a former major in the Fairfax County Sheriff's Department in Virginia. He has a background in digital forensics and previously supervised investigators.

Quinn says the spread of facial recognition technology has led investigators to believe there will be suitable digital evidence in every case, similar to the way the TV show *CSI* led people to believe there would always be DNA or physical forensic evidence. In reality, security camera images can be grainy, low quality, from odd angles, and suffer from lighting issues that hinder a good match.

Given widespread mistrust of police in some areas, "we really need to put it out there and help educate our communities as to the value of this stuff and how we're using it," Quinn says. Referring to [bans on facial recognition](#) use in some cities, he says it otherwise "becomes very easy to discuss these technologies in terms of all or nothing."

As more states and cities consider restricting the technology, a September report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank, suggests that Congress create national standards to prevent a patchwork of regulation. Lead author James Lewis says he supports facial recognition and thinks its spread is inevitable but that there should be transparency around how the technology is used in criminal investigations. Seven US states and cities, including Boston and [San Francisco](#), have adopted full or partial bans of facial recognition by government agencies. Lewis doesn't think Congress will follow suit, in part because of the January 6 attack on the US Capitol and ensuing investigation, saying, "I think that's influential, when you have to hide in a closet."

An [analysis](#) by the Human Rights Law Review at Columbia University concluded that "defendants face meaningful barriers to challenging" the technology and called on Congress to pass a law requiring disclosure. The report also called for procedural safeguards, such as regular testing and a minimum threshold for the accuracy of facial recognition systems.

White House science and tech policy leaders [endorsed](#) more disclosure around the use of artificial intelligence as part of an AI Bill of Rights last fall. Regulation of facial recognition technology has [drawn bipartisan support](#) in Congress, but there are no federal restrictions on use of the tech by law enforcement, despite a documented [lack of guardrails](#) for federal agencies using the tech.

The National District Attorneys Association (NDAA) says it instructs its more than 5,000 members to use "professional judgment and discretion" when it comes to divulging the use of facial recognition and to consider issues like public safety, privacy, and relevance when making these decisions. NDAA officials did not respond to requests for examples of how disclosing facial recognition use in a criminal investigation could threaten public safety.

"The longer things remain secret, the harder it is to challenge them, and the harder it is to challenge them, the longer police go without courts putting limits on what they can do," says Nathan Wessler, who leads the Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project at the ACLU.

An Attempt to Learn More

Defense attorneys say their best hope of getting police and prosecutors to reveal that facial recognition helped identify a suspect rests on a 1963 Supreme Court decision. In *Brady v Maryland*, the court ruled that police must turn over to a defendant any evidence they collected that would exonerate that defendant.

The best-known case involving facial recognition and the Brady decision is that of Willie Allen Lynch, a Florida man convicted in 2016 of selling \$50 in crack cocaine, in part based on facial recognition, and

sentenced to eight years in prison. During his trial, Lynch, who defended himself for a period of time, argued he should be able to cross-examine a crime analyst who had performed the facial recognition scan and sent a single photo of Lynch to investigators. In a pretrial deposition, the analyst testified that she didn't fully understand how the facial recognition program worked.

In December 2018, a Florida appeals court denied Lynch's appeal, arguing that he had failed to demonstrate on Brady grounds that documents like pictures of other potential subjects would have changed the outcome of a trial.

Lynch then appealed to the Florida Supreme Court, seeking more information about how facial recognition was used in his case, including pictures of other potential matches and the software behind the algorithm. The appeal was [supported by groups](#) including the ACLU, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Georgetown Law Center on Privacy and Technology, and the Innocence Project. They argued that uncertainty around the results of facial recognition analysis should be treated as equivalent to eyewitnesses who said they weren't sure they would recognize the person who committed a crime. The Florida Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

In the years leading up to the Lynch case, public defenders in Pinellas County, where Lynch was charged, said they had not been told that facial recognition was being used. However, the 2016 Georgetown report found that the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office maintained a facial recognition system, [FACES](#), that law enforcement agencies across Florida tapped thousands of times a year over the span of 15 years. In December 2021, the *Sun-Sentinel* and Pulitzer Center [reported](#) that Palm Beach County public defenders are rarely notified when police use facial recognition in a criminal investigation and that in Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, FACES is disproportionately used in cases involving Black people.

In New York, judges in at least four cases have declined suspects' requests for more information about the facial recognition program that contributed to their arrest. Jackson, the public defender in the Bronx, thinks it can be easy for people whose lives are never touched by the criminal justice system to not worry about facial recognition. She says that's a mistake.

"I think people sometimes feel a sense of ease, like 'That would never happen to me because I'm not somebody who has had a lot of interactions with the police,'" Jackson says. "But no one can guarantee that you don't look a lot like somebody who committed a crime. Nobody is safe from poor facial recognition technology."

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HEADLINE	03/07 Concern grows: rising crime South Sound
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/concern-grows-over-rising-crime-south-sound-after-violent-weekend/HNSB2G7FAVA2BC77SFL6M7TTUY/
GIST	<p>PIERCE COUNTY, Wash. — One man is dead and another is seriously injured after two separate shootings in Pierce County this weekend.</p> <p>A shooting at a Spanaway bar seriously injured one man Sunday.</p> <p>Just thirty minutes later, a shooting in Graham left another man dead after detectives say an intoxicated man was asked to leave a bar, then grabbed a gun from his truck in the parking lot and started shooting.</p> <p>Pierce County Sheriff's Department Sgt. Darren Moss says he believes the rise in violent crime is related to several factors including COVID-19, police reform laws and staffing shortages.</p> <p>"We definitely have to be more reactive now," said Moss.</p> <p>The department is down by 48 deputies, which has led to a lack of proactive enforcement units and cuts to the crime suppression team, who go after highly-violent offenders.</p>

	<p>“When does he have time to go follow up on one of those cases? Because every day, there’s another 10 calls waiting for him. There’s way more than that, actually,” said Moss.</p> <p>There have been eight homicides in unincorporated areas of Pierce County — which excludes cities like Tacoma and Puyallup — so far this year and Tacoma has seen nine homicides.</p> <p>In comparison, the city of Seattle, which is more than three times the size of Tacoma, has had 11 homicides.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Islamic center in Burien damaged in hit, run
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/muslim-organizations-prayer-center-in-burien-damaged-during-hit-and-run/281-a4d6897e-bc4f-44aa-a59e-93acd81e4465
GIST	<p>BURIEN, Wash. — The Muslim American Youth Foundation's center in Burien was damaged in a hit-and-run Monday morning, according to the Washington chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).</p> <p>A silver vehicle rammed into the prayer space inside the community center, according to CAIR. The car then reversed and sped off, leaving behind the bumper, according to the King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO).</p> <p>Witnesses say they saw an occupied vehicle parked at a parking lot up the hill from the center before the incident, according to KCSO. The car then rolled down the hill into the window of the building, according to witnesses.</p> <p>The vehicle was described as a silver Toyota Camry, according to KCSO. Detectives continue to investigate.</p> <p>This is the fifth Islamic center in Washington that has been targeted within the past four months, according to CAIR.</p> <p>"This is yet another disturbing act of violence at a Washington State Islamic center," CAIR-WA Executive Director Imraan Siddiqi said in a statement. "If there happened to be people praying inside the facility at the time of this hit-and-run, we would be talking about extensive injuries taking place. This is a community that is a haven for many young people, and it’s heartbreaking to see their facility damaged in this way."</p> <p>In October 2021, a 38-year-old man was arrested in connection with a fire at the University Place mosque, located at the Islamic Center of Tacoma. The fire began with people still inside the building, although no one was injured, according to firefighters at the scene.</p> <p>In December, someone threw an explosive device into the Islamic Center of Olympia, creating a blast that neighbors reported could be heard up to two miles away.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/07 Court narrows law reach to career criminals
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/high-court-narrows-reach-of-law-targeting-career-criminals/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday narrowed the reach of a federal law that strengthens penalties for career criminals found to illegally have a gun.</p> <p>The high court was ruling in the case of a man a lower court classified as a career criminal after counting the man’s burglary of 10 different public storage units on a single evening as 10 separate offenses. The high court said unanimously Monday that was an error.</p>

The man's 10 burglary convictions should have been treated as one event rather than separate crimes when considering whether he qualified for a stiffened sentence under the federal Armed Career Criminal Act, the justices concluded.

Without the stronger sentence, the man's recommended sentence would have been approximately two years, but he was instead sentenced to nearly 16.

"Convictions arising from a single criminal episode ... can count only once under ACCA," Justice Elena Kagan wrote.

The decision could result in reduced sentences for other people subject to stronger sentences under the law. According to a U.S. Sentencing Commission report, however, people classified as armed career criminals have recently made up less than one percent of those sentenced every year for federal offenses.

The Armed Career Criminal Act requires a 15-year mandatory minimum sentence for anyone found to have a gun after three or more previous convictions for violent felonies or serious drug offenses. The law says that each of the offenses must have been "committed on occasions different from one another."

Kagan wrote that a single "occasion" can include distinct activities, citing the example of multiple events occurring on a couple's wedding day.

"The occasion of a wedding, for example, often includes a ceremony, cocktail hour, dinner, and dancing. Those doings are proximate in time and place, and have a shared theme (celebrating the happy couple); their connections are, indeed, what makes them part of a single event. But they do not occur at the same moment," she said. "The newlyweds would surely take offense if a guest organized a conga line in the middle of their vows. That is because an occasion may ... encompass a number of non-simultaneous activities."

The case before the justices involved William Dale Wooden. Wooden had a lengthy criminal history and was convicted in 2018 in Tennessee of being a felon in possession of a firearm. A judge concluded he should qualify for the Armed Career Criminal Act's sentencing "enhancement." That conclusion was based on a 2005 burglary conviction and the fact that he had pleaded guilty in 1997 to 10 counts of burglary for joining in the burglary of 10 units at a ministorage facility in Dalton, Georgia.

Wooden argued the burglaries should count as one conviction, but lower courts disagreed.

"We're delighted the Supreme Court agrees that Mr. Wooden is not an armed career criminal and never should have been subject to a fifteen-year mandatory-minimum sentence," Wooden's attorney Allon Kedem wrote in an email.

Kedem said that the government had previously agreed that his recommended a sentence had he not qualified for a stronger sentence under the Armed Career Criminal Act was about two years and he has already served much more than that. Kedem said that "once he is resentenced, we expect him to be sent back home to his family."

The Armed Career Criminal Act has been the subject of frequent litigation before the Supreme Court.

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HEADLINE	03/07 NFL Richard Sherman pleads guilty
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/NFL-cornerback-Richard-Sherman-pleads-guilty-to-2-16984217.php
GIST	SEATTLE (AP) — Tampa Bay Buccaneers cornerback Richard Sherman pleaded guilty in Seattle on Monday to two misdemeanor charges stemming from a drunken driving and domestic disturbance last summer, as part of an agreement that spares him further jail time.

Sherman was arrested July 14 after police said he crashed his SUV in a construction zone and tried to break into his in-laws' suburban Seattle home. His father-in-law, Raymond Moss, told officers that he armed himself with a handgun and fired pepper-spray at Sherman to protect his family.

The break-in attempt was captured on the home's surveillance camera, which was later released by the court.

Sherman, who said after the arrest he was "deeply remorseful," pleaded guilty Monday in King County Superior Court to two misdemeanor counts, first-degree negligent driving and second-degree criminal trespass. He also admitted to a criminal infraction of speeding in a roadway construction zone.

"I'm grateful for the community we have and the way people continue to accept you even though you're a flawed human being and made a mistake," Sherman told the court.

Sherman, a former star with the Seattle Seahawks and San Francisco 49ers, will pay about \$825 in legal fees, plus \$500 for speeding in the construction zone, and be under court supervision for two years. He will be responsible for paying an as-yet-undetermined amount in restitution for damage to his in-laws' house and to the state transportation department.

The judge gave Sherman credit for the two days he spent in custody when he was first arrested and suspended the 88 days remaining on the sentence, meaning he won't be required to serve any additional time behind bars if he keeps out of trouble.

In an email, the King County prosecutor's office said the resolution was in line with comparable cases.

"Mr. Sherman did not get special treatment one way or the other," spokesman Casey McNerthney wrote.

Sherman originally faced several misdemeanor charges, including driving under the influence, reckless endangerment of roadway workers, second-degree criminal trespass, resisting arrest and third-degree malicious mischief.

Sherman had been belligerent, drinking heavily and had spoken of killing himself when he left his home in Maple Valley the night of July 13, according to police reports. His wife, Ashley Sherman, called 911 to try to have police stop him. He crashed in a construction zone along Highway 520 and then went to his in-laws' home in Redmond.

Sherman, 33, became a Seattle sports legend during seven seasons with Seahawks. The cornerback was a star in their run to a 2014 Super Bowl victory, making a game-saving play to deflect a pass in the NFC championship game against the 49ers.

He is also the founder of the Blanket Coverage Foundation, a charity that provides low-income students with school supplies and clothes.

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HEADLINE	03/07 Iowa: shooting outside high school; 1 dead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/multiple-people-shot-des-moines-iowa-high-school/story?id=83305289
GIST	<p>One teenager is dead and two others remain hospitalized after a shooting Monday afternoon outside a high school in Des Moines, Iowa, police said. Multiple people were shot</p> <p>The shooting occurred outside East High School, according to the Des Moines Police Department.</p> <p>Two female East High School students, ages 16 and 18, were hospitalized in critical condition.</p> <p>The teenager who died was a 15-year-old boy. He was not a student at the school.</p>

	<p>"Unfortunately what happened here today is just another pointless tragedy in our community, people using firearms to settle their differences," Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert said Monday.</p> <p>The gunfire appears to have come from a passing vehicle, police said.</p> <p>Police said Monday night that potential suspects have been detained, but no charges have been filed at this time.</p> <p>"Witnesses are being interviewed, evidence examined, investigative leads followed, and multiple search warrants are being executed," police said in a news release.</p> <p>The high school was immediately on lockdown Monday afternoon, but Des Moines Public School District tweeted students were being dismissed on time after police and the school district gave an all-clear.</p>
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